



THE
APPLE-
TREE
GIRL

By

GEORGE
WESTON

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THE APPLE TREE GIRL

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BY GEORGE WESTON

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"OH, NEIL, I CAN'T! YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND!"

THE APPLE-TREE GIRL

THE STORY OF LITTLE MISS
MOSES, WHO LED HERSELF
INTO THE PROMISED LAND

BY

GEORGE WESTON

AUTHOR OF "OH, MARY, BE CAREFUL!" ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY F. R. GRUGER



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THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY
DEDICATED TO MY MOTHER
G. W.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

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THE APPLE TREE GIRL

CHAPTER I

SHE was such an old-fashioned little thing——!

“And ever likely to be old-fashioned,” said Aunt Hepzibah, “born up here at Marlin Mills and raised, as a body might say, right in the shadow of Micah’s apple tree!”

I smiled at Aunt Hepzibah then; but thinking it over now, I begin to see that the wonderful things which happened to Charlotte Marlin might never have taken place if it hadn’t been for the history of Marlin Mills and the story of Micah’s apple tree.

In its day Marlin Mills had been one of the prettiest and happiest of villages. Even now it has an avenue of elms by

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the side of the river, which is worth going many a mile to see. History tells us that Lafayette once walked beneath those elms and talked with Washington. Five years before that Nathan Hale walked under them, too, in the winter when he taught the school at Marlin Mills. Yes, and many a beau and many a belle enjoyed their shade in the days when gentlemen powdered their hair and wore lace cuffs, and the ladies dressed themselves in panniers and danced the minuet.

Perhaps at night, when the mists arise from the river and wreath themselves among the elms, these couples walk again, re-living hours so happy that they wish to make them immortal. For myself, I know if I were a ghost I would like nothing better than to walk under the old Marlin elms with the spirit of one I had loved, and where the moon shone through the trees to give my partner a stately bow and dance the minuet.

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And the beauty of it is, no living soul would be likely to interrupt us, for the history of Marlin Mills is nearly finished; its houses are falling in ruins, and it won't be many years now before the last of the Old Guard will either move or (with greater dignity) be moved away.

To the east of the village is a hill, flat-topped and stony, and on the top of this hill, overlooking the village below, stands the Marlin farm and homestead—the place where my heroine was born.

Charlotte, my heroine, was six years old when she heard the story of Micah's apple tree, and I will tell it to you exactly as it was told to her.

Aunt Hepzibah was out at the time, and Ma'm Bazin was ironing in the kitchen. Ma'm Bazin was their hired girl—a French-Canadienne of about fifty, enormously fat, full of sentiment and blessed with the gift of tongues. That afternoon Charlotte had gone into

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the kitchen holding her hands behind her. She watched Ma'm Bazin for a time in her old-fashioned way and then, holding out her hands, she said: "Look! Why do they call these Micah's apples?"

She had in her hand two apples. They were of a pale—I had almost said a sad—color; but here and there on the skin were small, raised spots of the shape and color of red currants.

"Hush!" cautioned Ma'm Bazin. She tiptoed to the hall door, enormously fat but full of sentiment, and then she made sure that no one was in the yard. As I have said, Charlotte was six years old, and you can imagine how she was impressed by these maneuvers.

"Nearly two hundred years ago," began Ma'm Bazin, "on this very farm, lived a farmer named Sowers and his four sons. They were lazy fellows, who do nothing but sit around and complain that a honest man he cannot prosper

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any more. The only work they do is to plant an orchard, being fond of the cider, and in the middle of the orchard there is one tree—a bittersweet—bearing very fine apples which everyone admires. It is a pale apple and of such peculiar flavor that when the frost she has come the neighbors drop in to say the good word, and always they stroll in the orchard to fill their pockets from the bittersweet tree.

“As the years go on, Meester Sowers and his four sons drink more and more of the cider and get more and more into debt, till one day the sheriff rap-a-rap-rap on this very door and say, if the taxes are not paid by the first of the year the place will be sold and they thrown out in the cold, cold world, lamenting. Whereat they look at each other and cry in a rage that the honest man he cannot prosper any more.

“The next day is Christmas Eve, and just after dark another visitor comes

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rap-a-rap-rap on the door. He has a pack on his back and they see it is Micah, the peddler, who pass' that way every winter. In those days, my dear, peddlers are well known for the money they carry, because the world she is poor and honest, and the banks have not yet come.

"Micah asks if he can stay for the night, and if nobody ever sees him again, nobody knows and nobody cares. For a peddler he is here to-day and gone to-morrow. It is only known that a few days later Meester Sowers pays his tax and other debts, and no one notices that there is one spot in the orchard where he and his sons they will never cast their eye.

"The months they come and the months they go, till the frost she falls again. Then the neighbors drop in to say the good word and stroll in the orchard to fill their pockets from the bittersweet tree. But presently they

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return with the full gallop and a visage white. 'Look!' they cry. 'These apples, so pale before, are covered with spots like blood!'

"What Meester Sowers say then I do not know, but the neighbors run back to the tree with shovels and picks. There in his grave at last they find poor Micah, and always after that it is called Micah's tree and Micah's apples, and always after that these spots appear as a witness that the sin which is buried at the foot of a tree it shall make itself known in the fruit."

It is an old wives' tale, of course, like the stories of fairies and witchcraft which you heard when you were a child and which have been told to children since time immemorial, yet it's a tale which is believed more than doubted throughout our part of Eastern Connecticut. So if it had its effect on Charlotte's mind, especially when she looked out of her window and gazed at Micah's tree, I

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don't think you can greatly blame her, or wonder if it helped to make her more old-fashioned than ever.

Such was the atmosphere in which she grew up.

Below the farm was Marlin Mills, its houses falling in, and columbines and ragged robins growing among the ruins of the dam. A handful of children still attended the school where Nathan Hale once taught; but every year the number decreased, and every year a new teacher had to be found to brave the increasing loneliness. And when Charlotte returned home from school and walked past the orchard, Micah's tree was waiting to remind her why old houses creak at night and why the wind howls down the chimney at times with such a note. And when she went in the house there was her father, old Moses Marlin, a grim, gaunt man who had never quite forgiven her because she wasn't a boy.

There are times, indeed, when I, too,

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have wished that she had been a boy, because she would probably have made a great inventor, or an even greater poet, brought up in such an incomparable environment. Yet on second thoughts I am always glad that she was a girl, because inventors and poets we have in plenty, but never before, I believe, did a girl set out on such a scale as Charlotte did to lead herself, a little Miss Moses, into the Promised Land.

As soon as she had mastered her Third Reader she gradually developed into a bookworm, one of the most industrious little bookworms imaginable.

“She was ten years old then,” said Aunt Hepzibah, “a spindly young ’un with her hair in two pigtails, but bright as a button, even if she was so quiet. ’Pears to me there were years when I never see her unless she had a book in her hand. She seemed to live and eat and sleep with the people she read about. Times there’d be tears in her eyes, and

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times she'd burst out laughing. 'What's the matter now?' I'd ask her. 'Oh, it's so funny!' she'd say, and curl up 'round the book again as if she'd never let go."

It was up at the old Marlin farm where Aunt Hepzibah told me these things, and, after I had gathered a few of Micah's apples, she let me look at the books which Charlotte had read. There was a set of Longfellow, and one of Dickens, and Hawthorne was there between Charles Reade and the Waverley Novels—good, old-fashioned sets of that half-morocco binding in which our grandfathers seemed to take such deep delight. It didn't require much imagination to picture Charlotte "curled up" in her chair by the window, laughing over Sam Weller, or her eyes filling with tears as she followed the fortunes of Evangeline. And when the twilight came I think we can both imagine her laying her book aside and looking out of the window at Micah's tree . . .

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and the village below . . . and the sunset over the far-off hills . . . dreaming the dreams which you used to dream when you were a child, and all unconsciously preparing herself for the quest of the Promised Land.

In short, if you had searched the country over it is doubtful if you could have found a scene—or a girl—more conducive to the growth of Romance. And as she grew older, and her dresses grew longer, and her straight lines and angles began to turn into tender young curves, she often found herself dreaming the Golden Dream of how the prince would presently come to court her.

Charlotte finished school in her fifteenth year, the one bright star in a small, dim lot of jewels. Twelve months before her father had taken to his bed and died in the same grim way he had lived, knowing himself the last of the Marlins and never quite forgiving her because she wasn't a boy. It was nearly

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a year before they found his will, and then it was discovered that he had left Charlotte the farm and ten thousand dollars in the bonds of a creamery company which he had formed in the hope of restoring to the village some measure of its past prosperity. After a family council following the reading of the will, it was decided that Charlotte should continue her education by going to the Penfield High School, Penfield being the nearest town and Aunt Grace living there with a daughter of Charlotte's age, who was also going to start at the high school that same year.

"The change will do her good, poor child!" said Aunt Harriet, a stout lady with a critical eye and a deep voice.

Charlotte was out in the hall, quietly dusting a picture which Aunt Grace was going to take away with her, but her relations didn't dream that she was so close at hand.

"She's a nice child," said Uncle Ezra.

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“But,” said Aunt Grace, “so old-fashioned!”

“She’s a loving little thing!” warmly cried Aunt Hepzibah. “You’ve no idea how I shall miss her when she’s gone.”

Hearing that from her station in the hall Charlotte felt her heart go out to Aunt Hepzibah, and she was just on the point of going in to her complimentary relations when they started talking again.

“She’s a regular little old maid!” said Uncle Ezra.

“Well, to tell you the truth, I think it’s pretty lucky she’s got that money,” said Aunt Grace.

“Just what I’ve been thinking—poor child!” said Aunt Harriet; and, dropping her voice to its deepest note, she added: “Isn’t she homely!”

CHAPTER II

UP to that moment it is doubtful if Charlotte had ever felt the least misgiving about her personal appearance; but, as you will realize, she had reached the age where such things count, and when she looked at herself in the mirror that night she stared very solemnly indeed.

A healthy young face stared at her—a face lit up by deeply tender eyes, expressive eyebrows and rosy cheeks. And if she had the Marlin nose, which was inclined to be beaky, and the Marlin chin, which was inclined to be sensitive, for my part I think they added character to her face, and, if I had been in Charlotte's place, I wouldn't have minded them one bit.

"I don't see what's the matter," she thought, still staring at herself. "I look the same as I always do."



SHE GAZED UPON HER PROFILE FOR THE FIRST TIME
IN HER LIFE—GAZED UPON IT IN SILENCE

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But that morning she had watched Aunt Grace arrange her hair with the aid of two mirrors, and it gave her an idea. She ran down to the kitchen, where a little square mirror hung over the sink. This she took to her room, and then, standing sideways in front of her dresser, she gazed upon her profile for the first time in her life—gazed upon it in silence, as though she were scrutinizing a stranger who had come to live with her and whom she didn't know whether she was going to like or not.

"It's my nose," she finally told herself in a voice that had a little break in it. "And my chin."

Poor Charlotte! Up till then, you see, she had taken her beauty for granted, the same as she had taken the length of her hair and the brightness of her eyes; and then suddenly to find that her nose was beaky like her father's had been, that her chin was inclined to favor his too, and that a supposedly loving aunt

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could stare around a room full of relations and whisper "Isn't she homely?"

For a long time she lay amid the ruins of her dreams, staring up into the dark, and with such a heavy feeling in her tender, young breast! As long as she could remember she had lived in a land of romance where all the men were handsome and all the maids were fair; and when she had dreamed of the future, as girls have dreamed since time immemorial, she had always imagined her prince riding along under the old Marlin elms, meeting her and falling in love with her at sight—suddenly stopping, his hand upon his heart—because she was so young and sweet and beautiful!

"And wouldn't it be awful now," she thought, almost sitting up in bed with the horror of it, "if no man ever looked at me because I'm homely, and if I had to live and die—a lonely old maid!"

Next morning Aunt Hepzibah came up to help her pack, for it had been de-

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cided that she should go to Penfield with her Aunt Grace.

Charlotte was very quiet for a time. "Oh, Aunt Hepzy," she said at last, "have you ever seen my cousin in Penfield, my cousin Margaret?"

"Twice," nodded Aunt Hepzibah. "Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. Is she pretty?"

"Pretty as paint," said Aunt Hepzibah promptly. "Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. I was wondering; that's all."

"Well, you'll see her soon enough. Prettiest girl in Penfield; everybody says so. Allus reminds me of Little Eva in 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'—and as false as a wagonload of monkeys," concluded Aunt Hepzibah, with that impartiality of opinion which is relationship's most radiant star.

"'False as a wagonload of monkeys'? Why—Aunt—Hepzy!"

"Well, I dunno as I ought to have

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said that. She may have changed since I saw her last. Anyhow, you'll see her soon enough; and after you've been there a month or two you write and tell me what you think."

As you can imagine from that, when Mr. Briggs' surrey reached Penfield that afternoon and turned down Maple Avenue, Charlotte was all eyes to see, all perceptions to perceive; and when Aunt Grace said "That's our house, next to where the man is raking leaves, and—I declare!—there's Margaret standing on the lawn," Charlotte felt as excited as though she were witnessing her first play. Margaret was a blonde with a complexion like the bloom on an Elberta peach, and features which would have reminded you of those bisque shepherdesses with which our grandmothers used to adorn their mantel shelves. Although both her parents were average folks, Margaret's figure and attitudes and manner were marked with a delicate

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grace, and her expression, especially when a stranger turned to look at her, had the supernal innocence which is generally associated with that picture of the little choir boy who is singing his Christmas carol in a beam of light. But all her life her parents, helped by the people of Penfield, had unconsciously conspired to spoil her, and as you've probably guessed from what Aunt Hepzibah said, they hadn't labored in vain.

From the first hour of Charlotte's arrival it seemed to be her part to act as a foil for her cousin's prettiness. And how Margaret enjoyed it! If you were to hear all the ingenious little tricks she did to shine at Charlotte's expense it would make it too long a chapter. Besides, you have probably seen the way such things are done, for they seem to be a part of human nature, like criticizing the minister or pretending that one never eats in the kitchen. You will also probably understand that, as time went

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on, Charlotte found herself thrown more and more upon the resources of her own company. She said little, but she used that old-fashioned head of hers a great deal; and, having such a criterion of beauty with which to compare herself, it didn't take her long to make up her mind on one important question.

"I guess Aunt Harriet was right," she sighed one night, looking at her reflection in the mirror after she had brushed her hair. "I'll never be pretty, or at least I'll never be pretty like Margaret is. Oh, well," and she drew another deep sigh, "if you're not pretty you've got to be smart. So I guess I've just got to be smart!"

And, whether or not it was nature's compensation, her studies seemed to come natural to her. She studied very hard, for one thing, thinking to herself: "I've got to be smart, or I'm nothing." For another thing, her mind wasn't disturbed and distracted by the young male

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students, because the young male students left Charlotte severely alone—that is, all except one poor boy, and he doesn't count, as you will very soon see.

Perhaps, too, if you reverse these reasons, you will know why Margaret was backward in her studies. Her dominant thought wasn't "How much can I learn?" but "How pretty I am!" And even if she had wished to study, the young men of Penfield would have made it difficult, so strong was the competition to walk home with her, to take her out riding, or to call in the evening and sing ballads of such a sentimental quaver that they quite harrowed the feelings of Charlotte who was studying upstairs—Charlotte was already among the leaders of her class, who had made up her mind to stand at the head or know the reason why.

"Great silly things!" she thought one night. "You'd think they'd have more sense. As if a girl doesn't amount to anything unless she's beautiful!"

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A sense of injustice began to rankle in her, that sense of injustice which was ultimately to lead her to her Three Great Sums.

"I guess the books are most to blame," she thought. "They always make their heroines beautiful." Frowning a little she ran over a list of the characters that she could remember. "Dora Spenlow was awfully pretty," she thought, her nose curling a little. "And so was Agnes, and She, and Juliet, and Little Dorrit and Little Nell and Lucy Ashton and Ethel Newcome—yes, and all the others, too."

For a moment she felt a challenge in the situation, and her heart warmed within her, as hearts have warmed since time immemorial at the prospect of leading a forlorn hope against a whole world in arms.

"I don't see why heroines have to be so terribly pretty," she thought. "I don't believe it's anything but a silly

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custom. Probably the minstrels started it. It's the same as if every gentleman still had to go around in armor, and every old woman was a witch. Why, the way the books have it, Margaret's the only girl in Penfield who could ever be a heroine, and I don't believe there's a girl in town—no, not one!—who wouldn't make a better heroine than she!"

Which was as far as she got just then; but after that, whenever Charlotte read a short story or a book and came to the author's description of his heroine, and read something like this: "I would like to describe the beauty of Lois Mallory, but words fail me," or "Her features were crisply and delicately chiseled, as though by a master sculptor," or "She had only to enter a room to eclipse everybody there"—whenever Charlotte came to a passage like that, her beaky little nose curled in a most refreshing manner and she cried to herself, "Oh, fudge!" As you will understand, "Oh,

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fudge!" was one of the things which she had learned at high school; and, as time went on, other signs of a growing sense of humor began to manifest themselves in our heroine. But on the whole, Charlotte remained much the same old-fashioned girl who had been born at Marlin Mills and raised, as a body might say, under the shadow of Micah's apple tree. She read a great deal, dreamed a great deal, and studied so hard that if you could have seen her bending over her books she would have reminded you of nothing so much as a young Minerva preparing to take her rightful place with the other elect upon Olympus.

"If people could only go on learning as long as they lived," she thought one day as she closed her algebra, "wouldn't they be able to do some wonderful sums!"

That started her thinking—she wasn't old-fashioned for nothing—and presently she continued: "Nearly every-

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thing you do is a sort of sum. If you do it right you get the proper answer, and if you do it wrong you fail. Yes, when you look at it that way, I guess a person's whole life is a sort of sum, but you have to die to know the answer. Oh, if I could only think of a sum that would make me famous all over the world!"

After that, whenever Charlotte made up her mind to do anything difficult, she would say, "I'm going to set myself a sum," and if it was hard to do, such as taking no notice of Margaret's meanness, or memorizing *Himmel und Erde* in her German reader, she would say to herself: "I can do it—I can do it if I'm smart!" And she always did it, because as she always solemnly told herself: "I've got to be smart, or I'm nothing."

So it isn't surprising that, at the end of her freshman year, she stood at the head of her class, while Margaret hovered perilously near the foot. This situa-

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tion wasn't at all pleasing to the pretty cousin.

"Mother," she said one afternoon, "what do you suppose is the matter with Charlotte?"

Aunt Grace looked at her niece as though she were ready for anything, and then she turned to her daughter in puzzled surprise. "Nothing that I can see," she said. "Why?"

"That's what I'd like to know," said Margaret, tossing her pretty head. "I don't know whether it's her nose, or whether she's studying too hard, but nobody else in the whole school looks like her. The other girls are beginning to notice it, too, and my friends are speaking to me about it. Perhaps that's why nobody ever walks home with her; I don't know."

An angry answer prickled on Charlotte's tongue, but she bit it back, this being one of the difficult sums which she had set herself to do. "No, sir!" she

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thought, cocking her beaky little nose. "She can be mean if she wants to, but she isn't going to make me mean!"

Which was partly due to that epic line of Ma'm Bazin's which often came to her memory when she thought of the spots on Micah's apples: "The sin which is buried at the foot of the tree, it shall make itself known in the fruit." So, instead of losing her temper, Charlotte simply gave her cousin a particularly old-fashioned look—and went for a walk to cool off.

That was the afternoon when she ran into the Boy Who Doesn't Count.

Charlotte had often noticed him. He was in his senior year at high school, and though he was the smartest boy in his class he wasn't at all homely, having one of those keen, wistful faces which go so well with curly hair. His name was Neil Kennedy, and perhaps because he had no mother, and perhaps because his father was seldom sober for two weeks

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together, Neil was a bashful boy who easily blushed, especially if you met him on his paper route, or if he thought you were looking at the patches on his clothes. Charlotte met him that afternoon near the red bridge with a bundle of papers and magazines under his arm—met him so unexpectedly as he was turning out of a gate that she ran right into him and not only sent his papers and magazines flying, but nearly sent him flying after them. Of course, she helped him gather his papers together, and, of course, they couldn't help speaking.

Next day, when she saw him at school, she smiled at him and he not only smiled back, but (not being accustomed to have girls notice him that way) he blushed like a beet.

“Mother,” said Margaret that afternoon, throwing her books down as soon as she reached home, “you'll have to

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speak to Charlotte. I feel so ashamed I don't know what to do."

"What's the matter now?" asked her patient mother.

"Matter? Mmh! You know that ragged Neil Kennedy, the boy who delivers papers? Well, Charlotte's gone and fell in love with him!"

Whereupon, Micah's apples or no Micah's apples, Charlotte showed such a bright, sparkling glow of temper that Margaret shrank back and, not knowing what else to do, she burst into tears. At this Charlotte's temper went cool again and she stared at her pretty cousin, her beaky little nose so curly with disgust that it would have done you good to see it. "Yes," she gravely nodded to herself that night, "that's our beautiful heroine!" But she tried her best not to make Neil blush again, although she spoke to him whenever she saw him.

"It's too ridiculous!" she thought. "There I used to think that a rich young

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man would come riding along to Marlin Mills some day, and we were going to have such a romantic time together. And first I find I'm homely! And then they begin to tease me about Neil Kennedy, who delivers papers and whose father drinks!" Whereat she shook that wise little head of hers, and more in wonder than sorrow she said: "Life's a funny sum!"

Thus the two cousins grew up, one growing more old-fashioned and the other growing prettier every day. By the time they reached their senior year at high school, Margaret had developed into what can only be described as a howling beauty, and Charlotte found herself dreaming more and more often of the day when she would do that sum which she had already decided would startle the world.

"Yes, and I can, too!" she told herself one afternoon. "I feel it in me!"

She had walked out into the country

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to the top of Flat Rock and was watching the sunset, and as that miracle of color began to unfold itself in the west Charlotte felt in her tender young bosom such a yearning for life and success that, quite involuntarily, she threw out her arms to the distant horizon and tears brimmed to her eyes. "I'll show them!" she whispered. "I'll show them if it's everything to be pretty, and nothing else counts!"

For that, you see, had almost come to be an obsession with her; and as she stood there, watching the sunset, she saw herself, in fancy, a little Miss Moses, leading herself and her sisters into a Promised Land where pretty maids count about the same as pretty men, and the average girl can be a heroine just as well as though she were a modern Hebe.

The sunset over, she went home, thoughtfully intent upon the Great Sum which she was going to set for herself,

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and as graduation day drew near she spent many an hour with herself, dreaming those grand, misty dreams which are the heritage of youth and ambition, and trying to shape them into tangible form. Many a career she sketched for herself, only to erase it from her mind with an impatient shake of her head. "I ought to think of something better than that," she would say; "and I will, too, if I'm smart!"

To tell the truth, much as she tried to hide it from herself, the element of romance was always present in her dreams. She didn't want a vocation so much as she wished for an adventure—an adventure of youth and love and success; a drama, if you like—something imaginative, something to appeal to the spirit as well as to the mind.

"I'll get it yet," she kept telling herself. "I'll get it yet if I'm smart, and I've got to be smart or I'm nothing."

Well, as a matter of fact, she "got

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it" the day after graduation, and it came to her (as such things generally do) in a way she had never expected. In their evening exercises some of the members of the graduating class gave a one-act play, and it won't take you long to guess that Margaret was the heroine. It is doubtful if she ever looked prettier in her life than she looked that night; and, because she was the acknowledged belle of Penfield and everyone felt proud of her (none of them knowing her half so well as her cousin Charlotte did), she was enthusiastically applauded. The next day her picture appeared in the "Penfield Journal," a two-column wide cut with a half-column notice, while Charlotte's name only appeared once, in a short sentence stating that she had graduated at the head of her class.

Poor Charlotte! A weaker character might have asked the despairing question: "What's the use of being smart?" After the performance the night before

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she remembered everyone had crowded around her pretty cousin to congratulate her, while she, who had graduated at the head of her class, had sat neglected in a corner, an old-fashioned little figure, thinking things out. And when the exercises were over, Willis Hayland had taken Margaret home—Willis Hayland, the richest young man in Penfield, while Charlotte had walked home with Aunt Grace, her beaky little nose held proudly to the stars, pretending not to care.

“Willis wanted to kiss me, too, mamma,” reported Margaret next day; “and he called me his little girl and asked me if he could come over to-night.” She had told her mother this before; she wanted Charlotte to hear it, too.

Charlotte heard it, but said nothing.

“I think it’s dreadful, the way they’ve put my picture in the paper,” continued Margaret, looking at the “Journal”

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again and unconsciously preening herself. "I was never so surprised in my life. And this awful piece about how popular and pretty I am."

But still Charlotte said nothing.

"I wonder why they didn't print your picture?" asked Margaret, turning to her cousin, piqued by her silence.

"How could they," retorted Charlotte, "when I didn't give them one?"

"Oh! Did anybody ask you for one?"

"No! They did not."

Margaret turned and took a long, lazy look at her cousin. "Good reason why," she said.

And then she laughed!

As everyone knows, there are laughs and laughs; and in spite of all she could do, Charlotte found herself divided between anger and tears. She went to her room as soon as she could, feeling as though her cheeks had been stung with nettles; and there she threw herself

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across her bed and cried in the pillow, as motherless girls have cried since time immemorial. Perhaps those tears were needed to clear the mists from her dreams. After awhile she calmly arose and bathed her face in cold water.

“Now!” she said, with that air of resolution which always fell upon her when she set herself a particularly difficult sum. “*She’s* popular with *some* of the people, but *I’m* going to make *everybody* like me! She had her picture in the ‘Penfield Journal,’ but I’m going to have my picture in all the papers! She thinks she’s going to marry Willis Hayland, but I’m going to marry one of the handsomest and richest young men in the whole United States!”

For a moment even Charlotte’s brightly glowing spirit felt awed in the contemplation of those Three Great Sums, but only for a moment. The next second she was looking at herself in the glass with a feeling of exaltation

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that was close to grandeur, looking at her deeply tender eyes, her expressive eyebrows and her flushed cheeks, looking at her Marlin's nose, which was inclined to be beaky, and her Marlin's chin, which was inclined to be sensitive—shaped, as it was, with that mobility which promises unfathomed tenderness.

“Yes! Yes! Yes!” she almost passionately whispered to herself, “as homely as I am!”

CHAPTER III

THE morning after Charlotte set herself those Three Great Sums she found that a feeling of reaction had followed the excitement of the night before. "Oh, I never, never could!" she told herself in a frightened voice. "I would only be a silly thing to try."

The more she thought it over the more she felt that way. And, truth to tell, her Three Great Sums were certainly formidable enough, even for a girl who had been graduated at the head of her class. "I might be able to get *some* folks to like me," she thought, "though I've never been able to make friends yet. And I might be able to get my picture in *some* of the papers, if I did something awful enough! But to make *everybody* like me—and have my picture in *all* the papers—and then on

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top of that to marry one of the handsomest and richest young men in the whole United States!" With something of a gasp she slipped out of bed and looked at her reflection in the mirror. "If I wasn't such a plain little thing!" she almost cried. "But—oh, dear!—perhaps the books are right after all, and a heroine's got to be beautiful."

Still, as you have seen, it wasn't for nothing that Charlotte had the old Marlin spirit and had been raised, as a body might say, right under the shadow of Micah's apple tree; and after she had appraised the hardness of her problem it gradually began to lose some of its terrors.

"Of course, anybody can do the easy sums," she thoughtfully reflected, "and, of course, somebody's got to marry him—I don't care who he is!"

So, as she dressed herself, she began to study her problem in a most delightful manner, at one moment reasoning

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with the power of a logician whose geometry papers had always been marked with an "A," and at the next reasoning with the sublime innocence of a country girl who had never been more than nine miles away from the farm where she was born.

"After all," she thought, "women have solved harder problems than mine. Think of Mrs. Browning, who made herself as famous as her husband; and think of Madame Curie, who discovered radium—and Helen Keller, who was deaf, dumb and blind! And think of the first woman lawyer and the first woman doctor—what sums they set themselves! So, after all," she repeated, "I don't see why I need be frightened—even at—even at—even at marrying a millionaire!"

She blushed at that, and began brushing her hair so hard that it crackled.

"It'll be like algebra, or French, or

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German," she thought. "If you look at the end of the textbook first, you think to yourself, 'I could never learn this'! But if you do a little every day, starting at the front of the book and working up step by step, why, it all comes just as easy!"

At that she felt so confident that she coiled her hair into a queenly little bob, and began to search her bureau drawer. There she found a tiny memorandum book bound in purple morocco, a Christmas present which someone had given her years before. Next she found a pencil, and then she wrote her first Great Sum on the first page of the purple book:

"One—How can I make everybody like me?"

Turning the page over she sat for a long time, nibbling the end of her pencil.

"Of course," she thought, "to get my picture in all the papers I shall have

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to do something to make myself famous. So that's really the next sum," and she wrote:

"Two—How can I make myself famous?"

The next proposition needed no reflection at all, and down it went straight-way:

"Three—How can I marry a millionaire?"

"I'll start on the first," she said, "because that's the easiest." And, hurriedly turning back to the first page, she repeated to herself over and over again: "How can I make everybody like me? How can I make everybody like me?"

A wide, deep question, this, when you think it over; and one, no doubt, that has puzzled many thousand minds, from queens' to quacks', since popularity had prizes to bestow. Wherefore it isn't surprising that Charlotte found it a hard nut for her little teeth; and it seemed to

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grow harder the more she tried to crack it.

All that day and the next and the next she thought it over, but still she failed to get an answer.

“Perhaps if I were to start a dancing class,” she thought once, for instance, “everybody would like me.”

But, in the first place, Charlotte couldn’t dance; and, in the second place, there was nowhere in Penfield where a dancing class could be held except in Thayer Hall; and Deacon Thayer didn’t believe in dancing, because of what the daughter of Herodias once did, and he wasn’t going to have any such doings going on in Thayer Hall. So, you see, that wouldn’t do.

“Perhaps if I gave comic recitations, like Bertha Ennis does, and made them all laugh,” thought Charlotte another time, “everybody would like me.”

But in the first place, Charlotte’s wasn’t the comic spirit (her childhood at

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Marlin Mills had something to do with this); and, in the second place, whenever she had to speak in public her feet seemed to grow so big and her hands so red, and her voice seemed to proceed from such a far country, that the whole proceeding was more like a nightmare to Charlotte than anything else.

So, as you plainly see again, that wouldn't do.

"If I could only do something to make myself famous," she thought, "everybody might like me."

But this, as she realized at once, was Sum Number Two, and after a few minutes' reflection it looked like a harder nut to crack than Number One.

"It's a good thing the easiest one comes first," she droopingly told herself, discouraged for a moment. It was only for a moment, though, and then her beaky little nose went up as resolutely as ever. "Never mind!" she cried. "I'll get them yet."



WHEN IT WAS OVER CHARLOTTE KNEW THAT THE MARTIN CREAMERY COMPANY HAD
GONE INTO BANKRUPTCY

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On the very next day an event took place which drove all thoughts of the Three Great Sums completely out of her mind. Judge Darbie called to see Aunt Grace, and then Charlotte was sent for. They broke the news to her as gently as they could, but when it was over Charlotte knew that the Marlin Creamery Company had gone into bankruptcy with such a crash that her bonds were practically worthless, that her income of ten dollars a week had utterly ceased to exist, and that all she had left in the world was the old Marlin farm and one hundred and eight dollars in the bank.

"So I'm not only homely," she whispered to her sober little self that night, "I'm poor as well!" And listening to Margaret, who was playing the piano to Willis Hayland, downstairs, she couldn't help half sobbing to herself: "Oh, dear! I'd rather be smart than pretty, but doesn't it make an awful lot of work?"

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For a long time after the piano downstairs had stopped, Charlotte lay awake, her Three Great Sums temporarily eclipsed by that greater problem which comes to nearly all of us at some time or other: that absorbing conundrum which relates to the making of a living, and is sometimes referred to as the Problem of Existence.

“Oh, well,” she thought, punching the pillow just before she settled down to sleep, “I’m young and healthy, and that’s a lot to be thankful for. Think of those poor emigrant girls who come over here, strangers in a strange land, and can’t even speak English. If they can get on I’m sure I can. So I’m not going to worry any more about it. There’s some way I can make a living in a great, big country like this, and if I’m smart it won’t take me long to find out how.”

She “found out how” the very next day, and the thought came to her (as such things often do) like a flash. “The

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teacher never stayed at the Mills for more than a year," she thought. "I'll go right over to Mr. Chapman's and see if there's a vacancy now."

But before going to see the school superintendent she put on her longest dress, and did her hair up old, and looked so prim and old-fashioned that all she needed was a bonnet and you would have thought that she had stepped right out of one of those old daguerrotypes, the kind with the oval pictures and the mats with the old-rose plush.

Mr. Chapman beamed when he saw his brightest graduate, and would have joked with her, but Charlotte was afraid to beam or joke back for fear he might think her too young or too giddy. So she sat sedately on the edge of her chair and sedately stated her errand. And how her heart jumped when she learned that there was indeed a vacancy at Marlin Mills, and how it jumped again when Mr. Chapman promised her the position!

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The very next day but one she received an official letter from the School Committee, formally appointing her to the vacant position. The salary was twenty-five dollars a month; but she couldn't have been any happier if it had been two hundred and fifty.

"I'm independent—independent!" she sang to herself, with much the same spirit, no doubt, that her forebears sang after a certain momentous affair which began in 1776; and she ran to the kitchen with the look of one who had the world at her feet.

"So you're really going?" asked Aunt Grace in a tired, flat voice. Aunt Grace had been ironing Margaret's dresses for the last two hours and looked as tired as she sounded.

"Yes, aunty, and I'm awfully sorry everytime I think of leaving you. Mr. Briggs is going to drive me over in the morning, so I must pack now."

Aunt Grace put the cool iron back on

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the stove and tried a new one with a quick dab of her moistened finger. The motion was quicker than the eye could follow, but her thoughts seemed to be on something else, because while she was trying the iron she was drawing a long, slow sigh. "I shall miss you an awful lot, Charlotte," she said.

They looked at each other—aunt and niece; Experience and Youth—and though neither spoke, each knew that the other was thinking of Margaret. As though by mutual consent they stood listening for a moment to the song Margaret was practising in the front room:

"You're wonderful—" (Chord)

"You're marvelous—" (Chord)

"You're the sweetest girl in the world."

Aunt Grace spoke first. Not even by silence would she consciously place her pretty daughter in the wrong. "If you ever find it lonesome over there," she said, "you come right back here."

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I'll run up and help you pack as soon as I get this other dress done."

Charlotte had to pass through the hall to go upstairs.

Margaret heard her and swung around on the piano stool. She was wearing a pink-and-white-striped skirt and a washable-silk blouse and, especially in comparison with her mother in the kitchen, she looked refreshingly sweet and cool. "Where are you going?" she asked.

"Upstairs," said Charlotte.

"What are you going to do?"

"Pack."

"Then you're really going to that hole?"

"Yes, I'm really going—to that hole—and earn my own living in that hole, if you want to know."

Margaret laughed. "I was telling Willis about it last night," she said.

"He says the only people at Marlin

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Mills are three old maids and a half-witted boy."

"When I get there there'll be four old maids," said Charlotte shortly.

"Oh, I don't know," laughed Margaret. "There's the half-witted boy, remember."

Charlotte bit the end of her tongue and went upstairs; but the next morning as she rode back to her birthplace in Mr. Briggs' wagon she found herself thinking of what her pretty cousin had told her.

When they first left Penfield the houses they passed had a prosperous appearance, and the people she saw waved their hands at her. But gradually, as they jolted farther and farther into the country, the farms began to look more and more dilapidated, and sharp-faced curiosity was seen more often than smiles.

"Great country for rocks hereabout," said Mr. Briggs, stroking his enormous

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mustache. "Farmers used to sharpen their sheep's noses so they could get a bite between the stones." After this ancient jest Mr. Briggs mutely retired (if one may speak that way) behind his enormous mustache, as though the prospect depressed him and he wished to philosophize upon life.

"There's one comfort," thought Charlotte, looking around: "It can't get any worse than this."

But a mile or two farther, after passing three abandoned farms, one after another, they came to the most desolate of all desolate sights, an abandoned church, with its steeple awry and its roof fallen in.

"Oh!" gasped Charlotte.

"Pretty bad!" agreed Mr. Briggs.

"What's the matter with these farms that the people don't stay here?"

"Too fur from the railway to take their milk. Sixteen miles there and back

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every day. Too much for any farm team."

"Then why does anybody live here?"

"Search me!" said the candid Mr. Briggs. "No place else to go, I guess."

Whereupon he retired again behind his enormous mustache, and poor Charlotte's heart felt so heavy and moved so strangely that it might have been a little pair of millstones in her bosom, grinding a grist of doleful premonitions. Knowing herself to be not far from tears she opened her bag for her handkerchief, and the first thing that touched her hand was that purple memorandum book in which she had entered her Three Great Sums.

"To make everybody like me!" she thought, looking around. "To make myself famous! And to marry a millionaire! Snf-ha!"

"Did you speak?" asked Mr. Briggs.

N-no," said Charlotte in an uncertain voice. "I was laughing; that's all."

CHAPTER IV

WHEN dinner was over Charlotte helped Aunt Hepzibah with the dishes, and then they began to exchange confidences. They talked about Aunt Grace, and Margaret, and Margaret's rich beau, and how Aunt Grace did up her quinces, and how much they paid the minister at Penfield; and then, the scene shifting to Marlin Mills, they talked about those faithful members of the Old Guard who had not yet moved or (with greater dignity) been moved away.

There were only six families left, and only seven pupils to attend the schoolhouse under the old Marlin elms, that same schoolhouse where Nathan Hale once taught before he went away to voice his deathless regret.

"And, out o' them seven, one's a bit

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simple," said Aunt Hepzibah. "Billy Bates. You remember him?"

"Yes," nodded Charlotte, frowning at what Margaret had said.

"The old folks haven't changed much—those that are left," continued her aunt. "A little crabbeder, you'll find 'em, and a little poorer. But that's Marlin Mills all over."

"I'm going for a walk this afternoon," said Charlotte, "and I'll make a few calls. If they were all like you, Aunt Hepzy, what a lovely time I'd have!" And she gave her aunt such a young-bear's hug that both of them felt their hearts grow warm, and they stood there for a moment, embracing, as those who love have embraced each other since time immemorial.

"Yes," thought Charlotte as she dressed to go out. "And if I had come home cross and cranky I'd soon be making Aunt Hepzibah cross and cranky, too. Which goes to show——" She

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paused, one shoe off and one shoe on, such an inspiration striking her that it brought a flush to her cheeks and a new brightness to her eye. "There!" she breathed to herself. "I do believe I've got it!"

She thought it over carefully, as though it were a problem in arithmetic or the syntax of a verb. "Yes," she whispered in exultation, "I do believe I've got the answer to my first Great Sum." She put on her other shoe, then, and went to her chair by the window—that same window where she used to sit and look at Micah's apple tree and the village below, and dream of Little Nell and Tiny Tim, and the beaus and belles who used to walk beneath the Marlin elms.

"Now!" she whispered. "Who are the only ones in Penfield that I really like?" She counted them on her fingers. "There's Aunt Grace. And Judge Darbie. And Mr. Chapman. And Miss

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Bartlett. And—and Neil Kennedy. And why do I like them? ” she triumphantly asked herself. “ I like them because they like me. There! And that’s the reason I like Aunt Hepzibah. She likes me! And that’s the reason I don’t like Margaret. She doesn’t like me! And that’s the reason all the young men like Margaret. She likes them! And that’s the reason nobody likes a selfish person, because a selfish person likes nobody but himself. There! So if I want people to like me I’ve got to like them. And if I want everybody to like me I’ve got to like everybody, and that’s all there is to it! There!”

She jumped from her chair, filled with that warmth of victory which she had always felt at school after a particularly difficult lesson had been learned; and, putting on her hat, she almost danced down the stairs, and started out to put her theory to the test.

Down the stairs and down the hill

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went Charlotte, as old-fashioned and bonny a figure as you would have found in these United States that day. Down over the bridge she tripped, past the grist mill with its columbines and ragged robins growing among the ruins of the dam, past the old blacksmith shop with the leather fallen from its bellows and its forge fire cold for nearly half a century, past a row of deserted tenements with gaunt holes in their roofs and half their clapboards gone, but each with its horseshoe hanging over the door to keep bad luck away.

The next cottage had curtains at the windows and zinnias growing in the front yard, and when Charlotte turned in at the gate she immediately became conscious of the shrewd-faced old woman who was watching her through the window.

“Hello, Mrs. Johnson!” she laughed, waving her hand. “I’m back again.”

The old woman disappeared, and a

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moment later the front door opened. "Well, I swanny!" she exclaimed. "If 'taint Charlotte Marlin, grewed out of all knowledge!"

If Charlotte had made that call the day before she would have contented herself with a quiet smile and a polite "How are you?" And quietness would have been met with quietness, and politeness with a dignified gentility. But this was a new Charlotte who was calling on Mrs. Johnson, a girl who wanted everybody to like her and who was willing to pay the reasonable price of liking everybody in exchange. So, instead of a quiet smile and a polite "How are you?" she danced up to Dame Johnson with a sparkle in her eye and planted such a kiss upon that withered old cheek that, as if by magic, a gentle color immediately blossomed there; for, oh, it had been many a year since a pair of young arms had folded themselves around Dame Johnson's shoulders, or a

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pair of young lips had pressed themselves against her cheek!

They chatted together for nearly half an hour, and the more they talked the more Charlotte found to like in her lonely old hostess. If you could only have heard the different things they talked about! But, in the first place, it would take too long; and, in the second place, it wasn't so much the things they said that counted as the way they said them.

It was the way they smiled at each other, the rich little duets of laughter they indulged in, the breathless nods of the head, the sympathetic faces they pulled, the delighted little snorts, and all those graces and adornments of speech which can only flourish in the warmth of understanding, and wilt away completely in the first cold blast that blows—little graces and adornments which quite defy description.

But one thing I can tell you: When

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Charlotte had eaten her cake and picked up her bunch of zinnias and kissed the old dame on her other withered cheek, those two parted firm friends and Charlotte knew she was well on the way toward solving her first Great Sum.

If you could only have heard Charlotte, too, on the other calls she made that afternoon, especially the one she made on the coquettish Miss Hawley, who was deaf and had an ear trumpet—but when all's said and done they were patterned largely after the first. Charlotte had simply made up her mind that she was going to like every body she called upon. As a result she made friends wherever she went, and at six o'clock she returned home radiant, her beaky little nose held high in triumph, as though it were holding a jubilee.

"Well?" said Aunt Hepzibah, who was busy at the stove. "See anybody?"

"Everybody!" laughed Charlotte.

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“Doesn’t take long. Found ’em a pretty mis’able lot, didn’t you?”

“No; I didn’t!” cried Charlotte with enthusiasm. “I think they’re the most interesting folks I ever met, and I love them—every one!”

Aunt Hepzibah turned, her features stricken into an expression of utter astonishment. “Well,” she said at last, her countenance growing more reflective, “I dunno but you’re right. My father used to say you could set yourself either for a thing or against it—one about as easy as the other; and he was a wise old man, though I say it myself. Still—you wait till you’ve lived among ’em as long as I have. You may have different notions then.”

But, whether or not the element of novelty entered into it, the fact remains that Charlotte soon became a great favorite in the limited society of Marlin Mills. She helped Dame Johnson turn her black silk skirt. She read the “Nor-

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wich Bulletin " to Mrs. Winthrop, who couldn't read, but would never confess it, though everybody knew it. She took fashion magazines to the coquettish Miss Hawley, who had been an acknowledged beauty in her day and had broken many a heart which had long since turned to dust. Yes, and before the month of August was over she was calling all the old men in the village "Uncle," and whenever any of the seven children happened to see her, you might have thought it was another Pied Piper of Hamelin just after the burgomaster's refusal to pay those thousand guilders.

"There!" thought Charlotte to herself one night, after making an entry in her little purple book. "I know how to make people like me, and now I'm ready for the Second Sum." An expression that was almost fear stole over her, and in slow, subdued tones she continued: "How can I make myself famous?"

She tried to figure out ways and means

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till her head began to ache. She couldn't sing; she couldn't act; she couldn't draw; she couldn't write; she couldn't play. Then what on earth, she asked herself, could she do? No wonder her poor little head ached! No wonder that, as the days went on, there were times when she felt like taking that little purple book and hurling it into the Quinebaug River as far as she could throw it.

She was glad of the diversion when Mr. Chapman rode over to see her the week before school started and explained the lessons for the first term.

"I had a young gentleman inquiring for you yesterday," he said, smiling with significance just before he left.

"Oh!" said Charlotte, looking very sedate indeed.

"Yes; Neil Kennedy. He was graduated three years ago, you remember, and won the Milner scholarship. Attending medical school now. He asked to be remembered."



"I'M GLAD HE'S GETTING ON SO WELL," SAID CHARLOTTE,
POLITELY

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“Thank you,” said Charlotte, more sedate than before.

“A fine young fellow—glad you know him,” continued Mr. Chapman warmly. “Works hard every summer, so he’ll have a few hundred dollars saved to start practice with. Going to make his mark in the world. Just the sort of a boy I like!”

“I’m glad he’s getting on so well,” said Charlotte, politely enough.

But that night, when she went down to the village to call on Dame Johnson, she began thinking it over; and when she walked back in the moonlight under the Marlin elms, she began thinking it over again; and the more she thought it over the more indignant she grew.

“I don’t see why Mr. Chapman spoke like that,” she said. “Neil Kennedy’s nothing to me! What if he has his plans? So have I! What if he does make his mark in the world? Can’t I make mine?”

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Yes, and I will, too, or know the reason why."

But oh, what a problem—a problem that many a million have vainly tried to figure out since this old world began to wag. If Charlotte had been a talented young man in a great city the sum would have been plenty hard enough—or if she had been a rich and beautiful girl it would have been plenty hard enough. But when you consider her living in that deserted village, a poor little schoolma'am who was about to teach for twenty-five dollars a month; a poor little schoolma'am, moreover, with a nose inclined to be beaky and a chin inclined to be sensitive; why then you can begin to see what sort of a sum it was that she had set herself.

Yet if you had met Charlotte on Thanksgiving afternoon that year, as she strode over the fields above the farm, I don't think you would have quarreled with her appearance. The sun and the

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wind had kissed her cheeks till they looked like ripe apples; her eyes had that depth of tenderness which seems to be reserved for old-fashioned girls; and the knowledge that everybody liked her had given her an indefinable winsomeness of manner which can only be suggested by the word "charm."

Summer and autumn in the country had done her a world of good. She was developing like a young goddess, and there were moments when she had such a vibrant gift of life that she threw out her arms and felt she could fly. That afternoon, particularly, as she strode up the hill which overlooked the farm, she walked as though her feet refused to stay on the ground, and over and over she kept repeating: "I've got it! Yes, and I'm sure I can do it. I'm sure I can—if I'm smart."

She reached the top of the hill quite out of breath, and made for an oak which overlooked the country for miles around.

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There she sat down and opened the two papers which she had been carrying under her arm. In each was the half-tone picture of a happy if somewhat disheveled young woman, and both pictures bore the caption: "Miss Agnes Hereford. International Woman Golf Champion."

"Of course, I don't know the first thing about golf now," mused Charlotte breathlessly, "except what I've read in the papers. But once upon a time Miss Hereford didn't know the first thing about it, either, and didn't she win the championship? And now I know that a girl can practice by herself. And now I know that a great big farm like this is the very best place to practice, too. So all I've got to do is to practice—and practice—and practice—morning, noon, and night—more than any girl in the world ever practiced before. And then ——" A thrill ran over her as she continued in awe-

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stricken accents “ ‘ Miss Charlotte Marlin, International Woman Golf Champion ’—and I’ll be famous, too! ”

She sat there dreaming and looking over the west till the spell of the sunset claimed her, as it always had claimed her ever since she could remember, with its golden mystery, its gorgeous grandeur, its promise and fulfilment of things that are felt but not seen.

“ What a beautiful world! ” breathed Charlotte.

She arose, feeling herself a part of the wonder and glory around her. In the road below a moving figure caught her eye.

“ Neil Kennedy,” she thought, frowning a little, the spell lifting. “ Home for Thanksgiving, I guess.”

And, her frown, deepening, the spell quite broken, she asked herself:

“ What has *he* come for? ”

CHAPTER V

LOOKING at Charlotte's Three Great Sums from one point of view, you will probably agree that they had a stupendous quality in them. She was plain, and yet she had made up her mind that every body who knew her should like her.

She lived in a practically deserted village, eight miles away from the nearest town or station, and yet she had resolved to be famous.

And finally she was poor, her only income being the twenty-five dollars a month which she received for teaching the school at Marlin Mills—and yet she had determined to marry one of the handsomest and richest young men in the whole United States—whoever and wherever he might be!

But for all the stupendous nature of

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the Three Great Sums which she had set herself, they also had in them that magnificent quality of simplicity—stupendous simplicity, if you like—which might be said to be the spirit of America. Indeed, in an allegorical way of speaking I like to think that Charlotte's story is a story of the spirit of American womanhood, daring in its ideals, regarding no ambition too high to be realized, and building up, step by step, a beacon light which yet may illumine the world.

For two years after organizing her Marlin Mills Golf Association (with its total membership of one!) Charlotte practiced, and worked, and studied with a single end in view. She sent for all the golf books she could find, subscribed to a golf magazine, memorized the records, studied the diagrams of the leading links, discovered there was a golf course near New London, became a non-resident member (which required the help of Judge Darbie and Mr. Chapman),

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went down there on Saturday mornings as often as she could afford it, made the club professional like her by that reasonable, rational method of liking him first, and secured his advice on the many points where she felt herself weak.

“My conscience!” he exclaimed one morning, after he had watched her play a particularly difficult shot. “Where did ye learn that now, I wonder?”

But if he had seen her at home, driving the ball around the old Marlin farm, he wouldn't have wondered. Or if he had seen her playing golf along the country lanes and over the fields on her way to school and back, attended by her Seven Faithful Caddies, he wouldn't have wondered either! Such hazards she had to play! Such shots she had to make! Stone walls had to be considered, ruts, swamps, patches of poison ivy, brush fields, Miss Hawley's geese and Bates' bull—oh, something like practice—and practical practice—and

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merry practice, too—with Billy Bates shouting “Jim’ny Christmas!” every time she made a good drive, and exclaiming “Plop!” every time the ball rolled into the hole.

Some days the grass would be wet and Charlotte would say to herself, even as you or I might have done: “I’ll take a rest to-day. No use getting my feet wet.” But then the thought would come to her: “Suppose the grass is wet on the day of the championship!” And a few minutes later you would have found her out in the orchard, driving the ball around among the trees and getting up such an appetite for breakfast!

Or some days she wouldn’t be feeling up to the mark, and then she would say to herself, even as you or I might have done: “I guess I’ll take a rest to-day. No use making myself sick.” And then would come the answering thought: “But suppose you feel this way on the day of the championship? You’ve got

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to be ready for anything!" Then out she'd go and "fight it off" till her cheeks glowed with that satisfaction which comes from work well done, and her eyes were bright with the victory of the spirit which never says "Oh, I can't!"

After the first burst of wonder, her golf was taken as a matter of course in the village. Nay, more: it was openly defended. "A girl of that age has to have suthin' to put her mind on," said old Dame Johnson one afternoon, nodding her head with the wisdom of her seventy-five years. "And me, I'd ruther see her traipsin' around after that little white ball than running around after some wuthless young fellow who'd marry her out of hand and move her away afore you could say 'Jack Robinson!'"

"She don't have to run after the young fellows," said the coquettish Miss Hawley, holding out her ear trumpet.

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"The young fellows are running after her."

"Pooh! You mean that young spark from Penfield?"

"Yes, him. I see him around in his car again this afternoon."

"Don't you worry about him. I see Charlotte talking to him the other day—and the stiff way she was holding her back! I tell you right now, he might as well stay home and save his gaso-leen."

In this spirited manner the village gossiped about young Doctor Kennedy, and if the old dame could have seen him at that moment her opinion of his chances would have gone down lower yet. Charlotte had been practicing difficult shots in the old gravel pit when Neil's car stopped.

"Hello, Charlotte!" he cheerfully cried.

She gave him a glance which seemed to say "What? You here again?" And turning back to her practice she

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remarked in the cold tone of formality:
“How do you do, Neil?”

“Just happened to be passing,” he said. “And, of course, I couldn’t help stopping.”

Festooned around the edge of the pit were the Seven Faithful Ones, their fourteen eyes gravely watching, their fourteen ears gravely listening. Charlotte went on trying her difficult shots, and a naughty, yes, a wicked thought gradually took shape in her mind, as wicked thoughts have taken shape since time immemorial.

“I practiced how to make people like me,” she thought, “because that was my First Sum. And I’m practising this because of my Second Sum. But there’s one thing I’ve never practiced yet ——”

She checked her thoughts and blushed tremendously, those fourteen eyes regarding her gravely from the edge of the pit. “I don’t care,” she thought, flying to her own defense; “he’s got no right

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to come around bothering me like this."

And though, even then, she wouldn't put her thought into words, if you could have looked deep down into her mind, and have lifted the veil of modesty which you would have found there, you would have come to one of those secret places which all of us keep hidden in the depths of our consciousness—and in that secret place of Charlotte's mind you would have found this unphrased thought burning ever so brightly, ever so impishly: "I'm going to pretend he's a millionaire—and practice on him!"

"Don't you want to take the children home in your car?"

Fourteen bright eyes turned upon the young physician, and the fire of hope flared high in seven young hearts.

"I'd rather take you home," he bluntly replied.

Charlotte tried that difficult shot again. "You can come back for me," she said.

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Whereupon he beckoned the Faithful Seven with enthusiasm, and with enthusiasm they tumbled down into the pit and charged upon the car. How they stowed themselves in that single-seated runabout can better be imagined than described. All you could see were seven excited children, and the doctor's head, and a suggestion of wheels. And when the Little Rattler started off, instead of its customary clashing and gnashing of gears, its rackety clatter of fenders and hood, all you could hear were the Seven Faithful Ones who were having the first car ride of their young lives and were finding it filled with the most exquisite emotions.

Compared to this loud departure, it didn't seem like the same Little Rattler which came back twenty minutes later and quietly waited, its door open, for Charlotte to take her place.

"Where shall we go?" asked Neil.

"I thought you were going to take me

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home," said Charlotte, looking at him with her deeply expressive eyes.

"Oh, I can always take you home. But where shall we go first?"

Charlotte considered for a moment, and then her weakness for sunsets prevailed. "Suppose we take this road to the top of the hill," she said. "There's a beautiful view from there."

As though it heard her, the Little Rattler at once roared forward and began to storm up the hill.

"You know, it won't always be like this," said Neil. "A doctor has to go slow the first year, but it won't be long now before I'll be making a good living. Say! Did you ever see my pill box?"

Written down, it looks like a prosaic question, but you would have been surprised at the sentiment which the young physician managed to crowd into it.

"N-no," said Charlotte.

"I'll show it to you as soon as we get to the top."

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Saying so, he stole a glance at her, and at the same time (covertly studying him) she happened to be stealing a glance at him. The next moment Charlotte was staring straight ahead; but the young physican wasn't!

"You know, I don't expect to be a country doctor all my life," he continued. "Some day I'm going to New York and take a post-graduate course in surgery, and keep working and studying till I get to be one of the best-known surgeons in the country. You'd be surprised how much those fellows make out of a single operation. Why some of 'em won't look at anything less than a thousand dollars!"

They had reached the top of the hill, and, as it wasn't yet time for the sunset, Charlotte looked at the pill box with its ingenious rows of vials and multicolored pellets.

"Isn't it wonderful!" she said, glanc-

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ing at him with her deeply expressive eyes.

She looked back at the vials and noticed that his hand trembled as it moved over them, and his voice trembled, too, as hands and voices have trembled since time immemorial when young men have felt their time is growing short.

In the west the sun had fallen below the horizon and the magic glow of the sunset fell on the valley below, which waited, hushed and expectant, for the greater glory of color to come. As Neil went on talking, it seemed to Charlotte that her heart had never been so full, that she had never been so near to understanding the Greatest Sum of All—that Sum which starts in the sunset and which never, never ends.

It was Neil's voice which broke the spell: "And when I'm getting, say, twenty-five a week, sure, you can quit this school-teaching and we'll get mar-

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ried, and rent that house of Doctor Baldwin's, furnished ——”

“Oh!” gasped Charlotte. “No, no, Neil! Stop! You mustn’t!”

“Why not?” he gently demanded, trying to find her hand.

In the panic which fell upon her, Charlotte's thoughts rallied around her favorite formula: “I've got to be smart!” Instinctively feeling that flight was the only way to safety, she jumped out of the car and pulled her golf clubs after her. “Oh, Neil, I can't!” she said. “You don't understand! I—I'll take a short cut through the fields and you'll be home all the sooner. Good-bye.”

She was over the wall before he realized what she was doing and had disappeared among the birches. Then, too late, he followed after and found himself lost in the brush.

“Oh, Charlotte!” he cried.

But no voice answered. He heard a

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noise among the leaves, and, hurrying toward it, he found it was a flock of quail which had been settling for the night.

“ Oh, Charlotte! ” he cried again.

But no voice answered him. Sadly, lonesomely, then, he returned to the Little Rattler and, when he glanced at it from over the wall, he saw that it had taken upon itself a strange, blurred appearance, as though he were looking at it through a pane of rain-swept glass.

CHAPTER VI

CHARLOTTE hurried down to the open fields below, vaguely frightened at the pounding of her heart, vaguely angry with herself because she felt that way. "As though I'd drop my plans for him!" she thought. "Would he drop his for me?"

She came to the open fields, but hesitated to cross them for fear that Neil might be watching and would follow. "I wonder if he's calling yet," she smiled half wistfully, half defiantly; and, still smiling, she bent her head and listened. Presently from the road she heard the noise of the Little Rattler, clattering down the hill. She pictured Neil at the wheel, lonely, disappointed, sadly going down the hill which he had mounted with such high hopes.

"I don't care!" she thought, tossing

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her head. "People have to be smart and think of themselves if they want to get on in the world. He was thinking of himself when he asked me, and I was thinking of myself when I ran away. . . . All the same, I'm glad I didn't have to practice on him. It was a horrid idea, and I'm glad I didn't have to. And I've found that a man can love me if he likes me—yes, homely as I am—and that's an awful lot to know."

It was knowledge, indeed, that gave her a deeper hold on life. Even as she swung down the fields to the farm, there seemed to be a greater sense of assurance in her poise, a prouder tilt to the angle of her chin; and in the next few weeks the Faithful Seven might have seen greater depths of tenderness in her eyes, especially when she turned to answer a question after looking through the window at the blue sky which hung over the old Marlin elms outside.

"I'm glad he hasn't come back," said

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Charlotte the day after school had closed for the summer. From which you can see that she must have been thinking of Neil, particularly as she was practising difficult shots in the gravel pit. "Tomorrow I'll go and have my name entered for the Woman's Tournament, and after that, of course, I shan't be able to think of anything else."

Next morning she went down to the New London Golf Club where, as you know, she was already good friends with Mr. Ogilvie, the professional. Perhaps her adventure with Neil had given an added assurance to her playing as well, but whatever it was, after she had gone around the course twice with Mr. Ogilvie, he not only opened his eyes in the widest amazement, but he also said: "Will ye come to the clubhouse a few minutes, Miss Marlin? I want to introduce you to our president and have a few words wi' him."

He left her in a chair on the veranda

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and went inside to find Mr. Phair, the president. Although Charlotte had never seen him, she had read of him often; and presently, when the sound of two voices came through an open window, one of them belonging to Mr. Ogilvie, it didn't require much effort to deduce that the other belonged to Mr. Phair.

"I tell ye, sir," said Mr. Ogilvie, "I've coached her till she's a wonder. The first time around I played easy, being unsuspicious, and she beat me. The second time I played as canny as I could, but she beat me just the same!"

"Good for the home talent!" laughed Mr. Phair. "Yes, I'd like to meet this prodigy of yours."

They found Charlotte on a corner of the veranda, looking out over the Sound. "You live near New London?" Mr. Phair asked her, when they had chatted for a time.

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"No," said Charlotte, "I live at Marlin Mills."

"Where's that?"

"In the northeast corner of the state, 'the wild part of Connecticut!'" she smiled. And then in an honest desire to play fair with this twinkling-eyed, gray-haired gentleman, she quietly added: "I'm the school-teacher up there."

"No!" he cried in delight.

"Oh, but I am," said Charlotte, and watched to see how he would take it. "Perhaps he won't like me," she thought, "now he knows I'm not rich. Perhaps he'll change his tone," she thought, "now he knows I'm a school-teacher."

But Charlotte needn't have worried. For one reason, Mr. Phair was an American gentleman, which is as far as anyone can get from being snobbish. And, for another reason, he had made his own millions and had made them

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honestly; that is to say, he had the gift of imagination and knew how to carry a plan out well. The golf course, the huge hotel, whose roof could be seen above the trees, the concrete road which wound along the shore for ten miles between a double line of maples, the cottages, the model farm—all these were the fruits of Mr. Phair's genius.

"My dear young lady!" he delightedly cried again, "if you can only win! But where have you been practising?"

"Up at the farm. The fields are much like the links here—all hills and hollows."

A deep content had fallen over her. "He likes me," she thought, "even if I am a school-teacher. He likes me even if I am poor and homely." She straightway fell to liking Mr. Phair with all her might and main, and when they parted half an hour later it was like a parting of old friends.

"I shall send your name in to-night,"

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he said. "And if you can bring the championship to New London—well, you wait and see what happens to you!"

That was in July, and the tournament began on the sixteenth of August. There were forty-seven entries that year for the Woman's International Title—including two from Canada, one from Hawaii, and three from Great Britain, among the latter being Lady Salisbury, the famous English player and holder of the title. "Imagine!" murmured Charlotte. "Coming all the way from Canada—and Honolulu—and England—and Scotland! And here I have the boldness to think that I can beat them all."

For a little while her heart turned heavy and her feet turned cold, but a few minutes later Charlotte tossed her head so vigorously that, if she had been a queen, her crown would certainly have tumbled off. "No, sir!" she cried. "Lady Salisbury can't frighten me. All

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the champions living are going to be beaten some day, and why shouldn't I beat one? "

But the next day, when she packed her suit case, she had to grow quite angry with herself to keep her courage up, and when Mr. Briggs' red-wheeled buggy came up from Penfield to take her to the station she wept openly and bade Aunt Hepzibah good-bye as though she never expected to see her in this world again.

The tournament began on Monday. The business of the first day was to reduce the number of contestants to thirty-two. Charlotte started early and turned in a score which easily qualified her as an entrant, and after that she had nothing to do except watch the others.

"I guess I'm the only poor one," she thought once. "All the others seem to have that dress and manner ——"

She was anxious to see Lady Salisbury, but the latter, also finishing early,

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had disappeared, and the most that Charlotte could learn was that her ladyship was staying with friends.

“It must be nice to be a ladyship staying with friends,” thought Charlotte, who was staying at a boarding house which Mr. Ogilvie had recommended; “but I guess I’ll see her soon enough. I only hope I shan’t be matched against her to-morrow.”

The next day the thirty-two qualifying players were paired off into sixteen sets of opponents. Charlotte was matched against a girl from California. After the first few minutes, the result was never in doubt. “Take it easy, miss,” said the highly gratified Mr. Ogilvie, who was caddying for Charlotte. “You hold her in the hollow of your hand.”

Thereafter Mr. Ogilvie’s face denoted such stoniness of expression that you might have been puzzled to know the state of his feelings; but if you could

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have seen the tremendous winks which he secretly gave himself from time to time, you would have known that at least he wasn't unhappy.

"Didn't I tell you?" he demanded, when Charlotte won against the girl from California.

The next day there were sixteen surviving players, which made eight contesting couples. Charlotte was suffering a reaction from the excitement of the day before, and she caused Mr. Ogilvie acute suffering for the first four holes. "She's cr-r-racking! She's cr-r-racking under the strain!" he groaned to himself.

But, as you will remember, Charlotte had made it a point to practice whenever she felt under the weather, and by the time they had finished half the course Mr. Ogilvie was breathing easily again. "Eh, but she's the bonny player!" he told Mr. Phair that afternoon when Charlotte had qualified for the semi-

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finals. "She was a wee bit shaky at the start, but I soon had her steadied down."

"Where is she now?" asked Mr. Phair.

"I misdoubt she's watching Lady Salisbury playing her last few holes."

They found her, very quiet and very thoughtful. "No wonder she's the champion," she was thinking, as Lady Salisbury made a smashing drive right straight for the last hole. "If I could only play like that!"

From this melancholy wish she was aroused by the pleasant voice of Mr. Phair who introduced Mrs. Phair to her.

"Where are you staying, my dear?" asked Mrs. Phair, when they had congratulated Charlotte on her showing of the last two days.

"I'm boarding," she answered as honest as ever; but even while she spoke she couldn't help comparing herself again to the brilliant Lady Salisbury, "who was staying with friends."

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"I want you to come and stay with us," said Mrs. Phair.

"Oh, thank you, but I couldn't!" gasped Charlotte.

"But, my dear; why not?"

"I—I only brought a few things with me."

"I think you're very sensible; but really, that has nothing to do with it. It isn't your clothes, you know, that Mr. Phair and I would like to have with us. It's yourself. You've no idea how interested we are in you, and how we hope you'll win."

"But I should feel so mortified if I didn't win," protested poor Charlotte.

"Then let us put it this way," said Mrs. Phair: "if you win you'll come and spend a week or two with us."

"I should love to," said Charlotte. "But it's a terrible big 'If!'"

Next day the contestants had narrowed down to four. To Charlotte's relief she wasn't matched against Lady

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Salisbury, but against Mrs. Hall, a veteran player from Long Island. Mr. Phair must have whispered a few words to the reporters the day before, because that morning nearly every metropolitan paper had a story in it about the "golfling schoolma'am," and when the day's play began, the gallery which followed Charlotte was larger than Lady Salisbury's.

"Oh, I've got to win!" she thought, noting the sympathetic glances and the friendly smiles which greeted her whichever way she turned; and her heart warmed to these strangers who were evidently wishing her well.

Under this influence she grandly rose to expectations, helped also by the fact that she had the advantage of youth in her favor. The veteran Mrs. Hall was feeling the effect of the four days' grind, and her play seemed pale when compared to the fire of her opponent's. In short, Charlotte won so easily that it surprised herself; and when a friendly

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cheer greeted the result, she felt that quick, tearful pride which she had always felt at school upon seeing Mr. Chapman come into the room and begin writing on the board:

ROLL OF HONOR

1. CHARLOTTE MARLIN 2. JAMES —

Lady Salisbury also won her match that day.

"I thought as much," said Mr. Ogilvie in a fine, stony ecstasy. "Ye'll have to fight it out wi' her ladyship to-morrow. But now I want you to come and let the newspaper lads take your photo. 'Tis a matter I promised them faithfully if they'd let you alone on the links."

He led her to the south side of the clubhouse, where the photographers were waiting, and a moment later Mr. Phair appeared with Lady Salisbury. The two contestants stood side by side while the camera shutters clicked. Lady Salisbury was a tall, striking type of

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rather masterful beauty, and there was somewhat more condescension than friendliness in her first manner to Charlotte—the manner of a grand lady who might be talking to a governess. Charlotte went into her shell directly, her heart fluttering more than a little.

But that was nothing to the way it fluttered the next morning when she stepped forward to lead off the deciding game. Around them was one of the largest crowds ever assembled on an American golf course, but all that Charlotte was conscious of at first was the critical eye of Lady Salisbury.

“I wish she wouldn’t stare so!” thought Charlotte, becoming more and more self-conscious every moment.

She furtively glanced around and saw that everyone else was watching her too; whereat her self-consciousness reached its climax. Her cheeks tingled; her knees started trembling.



LADY SALISBURY'S CRITICAL EYE WAS FOLLOWING HER LIKE A
SEARCHLIGHT

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“It’s because I’m such a plain thing!” she sighed as she advanced to the ball.

Lady Salisbury’s critical eye was following her like a searchlight, and altogether it wasn’t surprising that after a wild swing Charlotte nearly missed her ball, which rolled forward a few miserable feet instead of sailing grandly half way to the hole.

The gallery gasped. Mr. Ogilvie groaned. And, fortunately for Charlotte, Lady Salisbury smiled. Yes, fortunately for Charlotte! And why? Because it only needed Lady Salisbury’s smile to drive the blush from her cheeks and to stiffen her knees till they felt as firm as two steel sockets. “I’ll show them,” she breathed; “yes—homely as I am!”

It was a thought which had won her many a struggle. She was no longer playing Lady Salisbury; she was playing her old imagined enemy—that wicked fairy who had tiptoed to her

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cradle and given her the Marlin nose and chin! She was no longer Charlotte Marlin; she was the apple-tree girl—a little Miss Moses on a pilgrimage, leading herself and her sisters into a promised land where pretty maids count about the same as pretty men, and the average girl can be a heroine just as well as though she were a modern Hebe!

Lady Salisbury drove off—with a beautiful drive—and then Charlotte advanced to her ball again. And, oh, what a silence fell upon the gallery! With deadly precision Charlotte gave the ball such a horrible smack that it swirled in the air as though shot from a gun. It sailed straight down the course and landed thirty yards in front of Lady Salisbury's!

"Ye'll be all right again now," said Mr. Ogilvie, with the exalted assurance of one who knows that his prayers have been answered; and when Charlotte's next shot took her ball to within a few

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feet of the hole, Mr. Ogilvie privately remarked in an aside to Lady Salisbury's caddie:

"Mon, you're beat before you start. You might as well pack up your box and go home!"

It would take an epic writer to do full justice to that game—to tell how Charlotte first went ahead, how Lady Salisbury overtook her, how they tied five holes in succession, how Lady Salisbury stared, how Charlotte stared back, how the gallery nudged one another, how Charlotte began to forge ahead, how desperately Lady Salisbury tried to overcome the lead, how she gradually pulled up, and how the gallery thrilled when Charlotte forged ahead again, simply because she could hit the ball harder than Lady Salisbury.

And why could Charlotte hit the ball so hard? First, because she was fighting for a principle; and, second, without a doubt, because of Micah's apple

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tree! As long as she could remember, she had carefully refrained from burying anything at the roots of her tree which might show upon the fruit when the day of harvest came. She had lived simply, sweetly—yes, and wisely, even to such little things as avoiding those late hours which are sometimes unavoidable if one is “staying with friends.”

In short, when Lady Salisbury cracked under the strain at the fourteenth hole (and quite lost her temper for a minute), Charlotte won the next three holes without the least effort in the world, and had not only gained the International Championship and brought the title back to America, but had also solved her Second Great Sum.

With all the handicaps in the world against her, with no one to thank but her brave, old-fashioned, little self, she had quietly emerged from the obscurity of Marlin Mills—and had made herself famous!

CHAPTER VII

THE Phairs, listening to no excuses, took Charlotte home and installed her in a beautiful room overlooking the Sound—a room and a view each like a scene from fairyland.

“Some day,” thought Charlotte after she had done her hair up for the night, “I shall have a house like this—when I have married my millionaire!”

She smiled a little as she said it, but she didn't smile long, because the more she thought about it, the more she felt that her Third Great Sum should be solved now or never. “I've got a chance to meet one here,” she mused, meaning, of course, a millionaire; “but if I wait till I get back home ——”

For a long time she sat there, dreaming and thinking, even as she dreamed

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and thought over her other two sums before she had found the answers.

“It’s so hard to tell about young men,” she told herself. “I might meet someone here to-morrow and think he was all right; but he might be married or he might be engaged, and there’s hardly any way of finding out unless you ask. And what would Mrs. Phair think if I went around asking: ‘Is he single? Is he engaged? Is he rich?’ She’d know right away what I meant.”

Thus she sat there dreaming and looking out at the moonlight on the water, as girls have sat and dreamed since time immemorial—and on much the same subject. “Besides,” she thought, “if I met him here I might never see him again. If I could only think of some romantic way to make his acquaintance—some way he’d never forget!” Again for a long time she sat and dreamed—and then she suddenly laughed, an irrepressible little laugh. “Wouldn’t it be

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funny?" she chuckled to herself. And even after she had said her prayers and curled herself up for the night, that irrepressible little laugh kept rising in the darkness like so many flights of a midnight lark which had ever such a rollicking story to tell.

The next day was Sunday, a day of rest from sums both great and small. But on Monday afternoon, when Charlotte strolled over to the Golf Club she had an indescribable but imminent manner, as though she were about to embark upon an important enterprise. The verandas were filled, and as soon as she could escape from the congratulations which swept upon her like an admiring tidal wave, she sought Mr. Ogilvie, sent him for their clubs, and took him to the bench near the first tee, where they could watch the players starting over the course.

"I suppose you know everybody here, Mr. Ogilvie," she said.

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“Aye, there’s not many I miss,” he confessed.

“And some are poor, I suppose, and some are rich?”

“Aweel, I’d say that some were rich and some were richer. There’s not much poverty in yon crowd.”

“Isn’t it funny!” said Charlotte with an innocent look. “I never saw a millionaire till I came down here. It’s a treat to me just to see them—to find out what they look like. Now take that man who’s just starting out—is he a millionaire?”

“N-no,” said the judgmatic Mr. Ogilvie, “he’s what I’d call just ordinary rich. But if you’ll wait a bit I’ll point ye out a few who can count it by the million. . . .

“There now!” he presently continued. “Ye see that stout old gentleman in the white shoes? He’s one! And ye see that wiry mon with the brown mustache? He’s one!”

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For the next five minutes Mr. Ogilvie led Charlotte around the edges of her destiny, and then at last he guided her straight to what she had been all the time hoping she would find.

"Look now!" he said. "Ye see the young mon who's just starting out? It's Perry Graham; ye've heard o' him! Rich? Eh, rich is no name for it!"

"Wasn't his father in steamships or something?" asked Charlotte.

"Aye! Steamships and railroads and banks and trust companies, and nubbody knows what all! But when he died two years ago, mark ye now, he couldn't take a penny of it with him. So his boy Perry come in for it all."

"Was that his wife I met on the veranda?" asked Charlotte.

"Perry's wife? Not likely! He isna married."

"I wonder why."

"Courted to death, I'm thinking," said Mr. Ogilvie dryly.

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“Poor thing!” said Charlotte, more dryly than he. “Well, if you’re ready now, we’ll start.”

They caught up to the highly courted Perry Graham at the fourth hole, and Charlotte had a good chance to look at him. “He’s really handsome,” she thought, her heart beginning to pound as she thought of what she was going to do. “I’d better do it now,” she hurriedly added, “or I’ll be too nervous.”

The fourth hole at New London is a secluded stretch of sward, hidden by a hill from the clubhouse and skirting a grove of yellow pines. Mr. Graham’s first shot had only gone about twenty yards, and as he walked toward it Charlotte very carefully began to take aim at him. At home she had often practiced hitting trees in the orchard; but this, you see, was more difficult because the tree was walking away from her.

“I don’t want to hit him too hard,” she thought, “only just enough to tell him how sorry I am, and make him re-

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member. And then, when Mr. Ogilvie introduces me, and he learns that I'm staying with the Phairs—well, anyhow, he'll be one iron in the fire."

She raised her club for the swing, and just as she was bringing it down, Mr. Graham half turned.

"Look out!" cried Mr. Ogilvie, suddenly seeing the danger.

Whether this shout upset Charlotte she never could tell herself, but when she made her drive she did it as she had always practiced driving. She made it with every ounce of her strength. The ball flew forward with a snarling speed that must have stung the air, and when Mr. Graham instinctively ducked to avoid it, he received it, full brunt, on the side of his forehead.

"Oh!" gasped Charlotte. "I've killed him!"

The next moment she was flying to where her victim lay motionless upon the turf, limp and oblivious to all his earthly cares.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN Perry Graham returned to consciousness after being hit by Charlotte's golf ball, the first thing he saw was a pair of deeply tender eyes looking straight into his. The next thing he discovered was the less romantic fact that he was lying flat on the grass with Mr. Ogilvie slapping his palms.

"What—what's the matter?" he weakly asked.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" gasped Charlotte, because for one horrible moment she really believed she had killed him. Then realizing that her gladness must seem out of place to the prostrate Mr. Graham, she hurriedly corrected herself, saying: "I'm so sorry!"

"What—what was it?" he further inquired.

"I hit you on the head with a ball,"

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said Charlotte in a voice not far from tears.

"Oh, yes, I remember now." He tried to rise, but Mr. Ogilvie had to help him.

"We must get him out o' the sun," said Mr. Ogilvie solicitously. "We must try to get him to yon tree by the side of the brook."

They went, a slowly moving procession, Mr. Graham in the middle, Charlotte on one side of him and Mr. Ogilvie on the other. Behind them followed the caddies, solemnly staring and forming one of the strangest equations in Charlotte's Third Great Sum.

"I'm so sorry!" she said again. A lump was rising on the side of Mr. Graham's head and looking at this Charlotte choked a little.

"It's all right, said Perry. "You couldn't help it, you know."

An awful feeling of guilt swept over Charlotte. And partly because she felt

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so blameworthy, and partly because it was the natural thing for her to do, she dipped her handkerchief in the brook and began to bathe the bump on the side of Perry's head.

"That's better," he said in a stronger voice, and looking at her more attentively he added: "You're Miss Marlin, aren't you?"

"Yes," said Charlotte, her voice growing weaker as his grew stronger.

"The girl who beat Lady Salisbury last week?"

"Y-yes."

"Great work!" he exclaimed. "By Jove, I'm proud you knocked me out."

He held out his hand, smiling already as he thought of himself telling the story to his friends, and little dreaming what coals of fire he was heaping on poor Charlotte's head. Indeed, if it hadn't been for the listening group around them she would have confessed to him then and there. They started back to

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the clubhouse, and then for the first time Charlotte began to look attentively at him.

He was a tall young man with commanding features, and although his eyes looked tired he had a somewhat peremptory manner.

"I guess it's because he's so rich," thought Charlotte. "And to think that I nearly killed him!" For the third time she felt the impulse to confess what she had done; and for the third time she repressed it. "They'd only stand around and stare and listen," she thought. "I can do it just as well some other time."

But although she saw him the next day—and the next but one—and the next after that, somehow Charlotte could never quite bring herself to the point of telling him what she had done. Meantime, whenever he saw her, Perry Graham became more and more interested in her, first because she was Char-

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lotte, and second because she was a celebrity, and third, without a doubt in the world, because she was a new experience to him and acted like a tonic to his system.

Because, when all is said and done, it would be unfair to Charlotte if you received the idea that she was nothing except a scheming little thing who went around seeking whom she might devour. Outside of her doing of the Three Famous Sums, she was an unusually sweet and wholesome little body, with deeply tender eyes, expressive eyebrows and a bashful manner, but, oh, so eager to live, so sincerely in love with life! It was those qualities of naïveté and enthusiasm and sincerity which drew Perry Graham's thoughts more and more often to the girl who had learned her first profound lesson of life from the story of Micah's apple tree.

The girls he had known before had been brought up in familiarity with

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practically everything he could offer them; but it was all so new to Charlotte, and the interest she felt showed in her cheeks and her eyes—a heartborn glow and sparkle which did him good to see.

“If he hadn’t been ‘courted to death,’ as Mr. Ogilvie says,” murmured Charlotte rather breathlessly one night, “I do believe I’d have a chance. But I must never let him dream that I care for him the least little bit, or he’ll think I’m just like all the others.”

So, half consciously and half instinctively, whenever Perry showed his growing liking for her, she drew back; and the more she drew back, the more he pressed forward in his pursuit of a new experience; and the more he pressed forward, the longer Charlotte lay awake when the rest of the household were asleep, thinking things over in her sage, old-fashioned way.

“I wish he didn’t have that tired look

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in his eyes when he thinks nobody is noticing him," she thought one night. "I suppose it's because he's so awfully rich; he's always had everything he wants and he soon gets tired of things. And perhaps if—if he had me, he'd soon get tired of me too. . . ."

She drew a deep sigh. "Neil wasn't that way," she thought. "I'd never have to worry about Neil."

"It's all so different down here," she continued. "Down here all the sums seem to be in money and things like that, but up home—! Now, take Perry. If he wants to enjoy himself he's got to be dressed just so, and he's got to have his car and somebody to amuse him, and he's got to have a lot of money in his pocket, and then go somewhere and spend it. If he had nothing except one old suit of clothes and was dropped suddenly in a strange country somewhere without any money, and was told to enjoy himself, he wouldn't have the least

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idea of how to go about it. Without money he's nothing."

She drew another deep sigh. "Neil isn't that way," she thought. "Money isn't everything to Neil."

"If I could only help Perry in some way," she went on, "I wouldn't feel like this. Because what's a wife for, if she can't help her husband? Now Mr. and Mrs. Phair weren't rich when they married, and so she was able to help him. That's one reason, I guess, why they feel so proud of each other now. But Perry—what could I do for Perry? Nothing! I'd just feel that I was tagging on behind."

She sighed again at that. "Neil isn't that way," she thought. "I'd never feel that I was tagging on to Neil."

"Oh, well," she concluded, "maybe I'm like the fox and the grapes. For one thing, Perry hasn't asked me, and just for that perhaps I think his grapes are sour."

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Her mind went back to the time when Neil had asked her and she had run away; and then she began thinking of Aunt Hepzibah, and Micah's tree, and Dame Johnson, and Miss Hawley and the Faithful Seven. And before she knew it she had such a homesick feeling come over her that she cried a little, as homesick girls have cried since time immemorial.

"I might have known there was something," she thought next morning.

A letter had come from Aunt Hepzibah, and Aunt Hepzibah hadn't been feeling well for the last few days; "nothing much the matter," she wrote, "but I'm dreadful low-spirited—one of my spells, I guess."

"I'm afraid I shall have to go home to-morrow," announced Charlotte, looking up from reading her letter.

Mrs. Phair tried to dissuade her, and so did Perry when he called in the evening.

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But Charlotte wasn't old-fashioned for nothing. "I feel I ought to go," she said.

At that, Mrs. Phair gave her husband one of her significant glances, and they went out on the veranda, leaving Perry and Charlotte together.

"Did you notice him, Joe?" whispered Mrs. Phair, outside.

"Notice who?" whispered back Mr. Phair, with a fine disregard for grammar.

"Perry Graham, of course! At first I hated to think of Charlotte's going; but now I can see it's the very best thing she could do. It's going to bring Perry to the point."

"You think so?"

"Joe, I know it! And the best thing that could happen to him, too. Of course everybody thinks he ought to marry a girl with a lot of money. But that's all nonsense, when he's got so much of his own. Besides, it isn't as if

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Charlotte was nobody. Not after the way she beat Lady Salisbury! And she's a good little thing, and a straight little thing, and wouldn't waste a dollar of Perry's money to the longest day she lived. I can tell he's been thinking about it, too. Trust a woman to know such things! Now, Joe, you mark my words: If those two aren't married before Thanksgiving I miss my guess!"

Perry stayed late that night, and before he left he had promised to take Charlotte to the station next day in time to catch the two o'clock train.

"We'll start about noon," he said, "so you'll have time to come home and have lunch with me. I'll ask my Cousin Fanny to telephone you first thing in the morning. She's a cousin of my mother's," he explained, "and has been keeping house for me the last two years."

Mrs. Phair grew very arch after his departure.

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"Do you like him, Charlotte?" she suddenly asked next morning.

"Oh, I don't know." Charlotte was putting her hat on while Perry waited in his car outside. "Why?"

"Because he's very fond of you."

"What makes you think so?" asked Charlotte, blushing for all that.

"Why, you dear little goose, anybody can see it. If he wasn't, do you think he'd be taking you home to lunch?"

Charlotte said nothing; but after she had bade the Phairs good-bye, which wasn't done in a minute or in any perfunctory manner, she went out to the waiting car, still blushing, her heart still warm to Mr. and Mrs. Phair, her eyes luminous with youth and love and success.

"You do look sweet this morning," said Perry as he threw in the starting lever. It was the first time he had paid

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her a direct compliment, and she pretended not to notice it.

"Isn't it a lovely day?" she said instead.

It was, indeed, a beautiful day, with the sky never so blue and the trees never so green, and the road winding in and out among scenes so picturesque that it reminded Charlotte of a gallery hung with immortal masterpieces.

She felt so full of happiness at the wonderful day and her wonderful summer that she grew radiant, as though her spark of life had spread into a visible glow. Looking at her Perry suddenly nodded to himself. The next moment he had reached over and taken one of her hands.

Charlotte dropped from the clouds to the earth, and drew her hand away.

"Don't!" she said.

"Why not?"

"I don't like it."

She sat as far away from him as she

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could, her joy in the day overcast by those sage, old-fashioned thoughts which had come to her the other night. By her side, both his hands on the wheel again, Perry seemed to be thinking of something very hard indeed.

“And now,” thought Charlotte, “if he’s like I think he is, he’ll want to do it all the more. Oh, dear! I shall have to tell him—I shall have to tell him how I knocked him down that day on purpose.”

But the more she tried to tell him, the harder it seemed; and a few minutes later, when Perry came out of his silence with the air of a man who has made a great resolution, she weakly decided to let well enough alone.

“How chatty he is, all at once!” she couldn’t help thinking.

A little later when he began to sing the chorus of an old song, she was almost too surprised to join in. She did join in, though, and after they had sung

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all the old songs they knew, Perry laughed aloud and screeched his horn at nothing. "I do feel good this morning," he said.

She didn't have the heart to tell him then.

They rolled upon the ferry, and the boat began to cross the Thames. Under this new excitement Charlotte found enchantment was returning to the day.

"I told them to have lunch ready at one," he said, looking at his watch. "We'll be just in time." And seeing that Charlotte was admiring the scene on the river, he added: "This is nothing to the view from the house. You wait."

She didn't have long to wait.

The Graham house is one of the show places of Pequot Avenue even as Pequot Avenue is one of the show places of Connecticut; and when the car rolled in at the gate, a feeling that was close to awe stole over Charlotte. She looked out over the harbor with its yachts anchored

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in the blue water; she looked at the grounds around the house, gay with flowers and restful with trees and lawns; she looked at the house itself—a magnificent piece of architecture in gray stone and red tiles. A gardener was raking leaves. Another was trimming a flower bed. A butler opened the door.

“Make yourself at home,” said Perry, frowning as he looked around. “This is the library. I’ll be back soon.”

But instead of going into the library she walked along the hall to look at the painting which hung over the fireplace.

“How beautiful everything is!” she thought. “It’s like a picture in a magazine, though I never saw a picture one-half as pretty as this.”

She stopped to look at a bronze statuette at the bottom of the stairs, and while she stood there she heard Perry’s voice coming from above.

“I told you one o’clock,” he was saying in an angry voice.

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A faint murmur answered him.

"Well, you thought wrong, and not the first time, either," he retorted. A curious screeching sound interrupted him. "Oh, for heaven's sake!" he cried. "Choke that parrot!"

Downstairs, Charlotte stiffened with indignation. "The idea!" she thought. "Talking to his mother's cousin like that! I'd like to hear him talk that way to me!"

When, a few minutes later, Perry strolled out with her to show her the flowers, she had made up her mind exactly what to do, and was casting around in her mind for the opening phrase. "I'll soon stop all this!" she told herself.

Perry had led her to a rose arbor at the back of the house, and was breaking off large clusters of Dorothy Perkinses with the prodigal actions of a nervous young man who had something on his mind and didn't know quite how to begin it.

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"Say, Charlotte," he said at last, "I think a lot of you; do you know it?"

"You shouldn't," she hurriedly answered.

"Shouldn't I? Why not?"

"Because I'm going home this afternoon—for good."

"For good?" he asked, looking puzzled at her emphasis. "What for?"

Those midnight fears came crowding forward for expression; but midnight fears are not to be lightly related when the sun is shining and a disputatious young man is waiting, frowning, to contradict every word you say.

"What for?" he repeated.

"Oh, I don't know."

"But I want to know!"

"Well, for one thing," said Charlotte, "I'm happier up there and more useful. Down here, it's like a vacation all the time and, though I don't pretend to know an awful lot, I'm sure that life ought to mean more than that. Then

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again, down here—it's all—all make-believe—somehow—but up there everything is so real ——” She stopped, lamely enough, knowing she could never give him the other reasons. How could she tell him, for instance, that she, a little country school-ma'am, didn't feel safe in trusting her happiness to one of the handsomest and richest young men in the whole United States? Or how could she tell him about Neil? Or about such things as Little Miss Moses and her pilgrimage to the Promised Land?

“You mean to say this isn't real?” asked Perry, sweeping his arm around to the house and grounds.

Charlotte buried her face in the roses he had given her and shook her head.

“And that's why you don't want it,” he asked incredulously—“because it isn't real?”

For the moment she almost felt her heart stop beating, so close was she to the realization of her Third Great Sum.

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"But if I won this," she thought, "I believe I'd lose everything else—and—and—well, it isn't worth it; that's all!"

So, heeding at last the voice of Conscience, she told him how she had knocked him down with the golf ball, and gave him so much food for thought that he was still digesting it in mingled surprise and admiration when he took Charlotte to the station and walked up and down the platform with her while they waited for the train.

"You're a great little girl; do you know it?" he asked.

Charlotte buried her face in the roses again, but said nothing.

"One thing I can't understand, though, is why you did it. Was it just for fun?"

"N-no," she said. "It—it was a sum."

"A sum?" he asked in astonishment.

"What do you mean—a sum?"

She thought it over while they walked

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to the end of the platform, and partly perhaps because it had relieved her to tell him about the golf ball, she told him also of her Three Great Sums—told him as quickly as she could, especially toward the end when the train came puffing into the station.

“Great Scott!” he muttered when she had ended.

They hurried to the waiting train together.

“Good-bye,” she said, shyly holding out her hand.

They shook hands; and the last Charlotte saw of him he was standing on the platform staring thoughtfully after the departing train.

CHAPTER IX

"I'M glad we parted friends," thought Charlotte, settling back in her seat, "and I'm glad it's all over. It was like that story of the boy who was caught in the rapids while playing in the water; but, thank goodness! I was able to get back to the shore in time." She relaxed and let her eyes rest on the smoothly flowing scenery outside.

"I wonder how 'Aunt Hepzibah is," she murmured to herself. "And Dame Johnson, and Miss Hawley, and the children. And I wonder if Margaret's getting on any better with her husband. And—and—and I wonder how Neil is. I'll drop in and see Aunt Grace before starting for home. She always knows the news. 'And perhaps I'll see Neil around somewhere, too."

The train reached Penfield at a quar-

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ter past four; and as Charlotte walked up the street to her aunt's house, it gave her a pleasant sense of content to see the people whom she knew so well.

"I wonder what they'll say about the championship," she thought. "Here comes Mr. Evans. I wonder if he'll want to stop."

But Mr. Evans, the ice man, passed right on with a friendly "Hello Charlotte."

"And here comes Deacon Kingsley, as busy as ever," she thought. "Surely he'll say something."

But all the busy deacon had to say was a busy "How do you do, Charlotte?"

She began to think it over. "I suppose it's because they take me as a matter of course," she said to herself, "just the same as I take them. For all I know, Mr. Evans may be the best fox hunter in Windham County, and Deacon Kingsley, the champion checker

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player. But they're both so busy with the real sums of life that they haven't time to bother with the little ones, and don't take them seriously. And there I believed I was coming home famous!" she thought, and added: "Why, I don't believe they've even heard about it."

But Aunt Grace had heard about it. "How well you're looking!" she said. "No wonder I hardly knew your picture in the paper when Margaret showed it to me."

So then, of course, they began to talk about Charlotte's pretty cousin.

"Poor Margaret!" sighed Aunt Grace. "She's not very happy, I'm afraid. Willis was such a good husband at first. But the last year Margaret's been left alone in that big house for weeks at a time. She talks about coming home this winter, but I declare I don't know what to do."

"How's Doctor Kennedy getting along?" asked Charlotte (oh, ever so

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carelessly!) when she had asked about everybody else.

For the first time Aunt Grace showed signs of enthusiasm. "He's certainly a clever doctor," she said, "and knows just how to handle my neuralgia. Last May he cured Fred Waller of his jaundice; and you know Mrs. Latham, who was bed-ridden so long?—well, he had her up and out again in no time; and since then he's had nearly all the practice he can handle. Last month he rented Doctor Baldwin's old house, furnished, but he's still taking his meals at Mrs. Potter's."

With heightened color Charlotte started up the street toward Mr. Briggs' livery stable and, thinking of the things which her aunt had told her, she looked curiously at the big house on top of the hill where her pretty cousin lived.

"Poor Margaret!" she thought. "Willis has probably found her out. And when a man is attracted to a girl

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because of her looks, after a while he's just as apt to be attracted by another girl because of *her* looks. Perhaps Margaret has found that out." She looked at the big house with growing sympathy. "I guess if the truth were known," she thought, "most of these beautiful heroines end that way. Everybody spoils them up to a certain point, and then the poor girls have to suffer for it. They can have their looks. I'm glad I'm smart, instead"—she continued up the street toward Mr. Briggs' livery stable—"if I *am* smart," she thoughtfully added.

Following this reflection she looked over to where Doctor Baldwin's old house stood, back on its maple-shaded lawn.

"I'm glad Neil's getting on so well," she thought. Her mind went back to that afternoon when she had run away from him. "I thought I was doing something smart, then," she ruefully

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laughed to herself. "Poor Neil! Treating him like that just because he wasn't a millionaire!"

She walked very slowly, as though she was in no hurry to view Mr. Briggs' enormous mustache, and once, when a car came rushing up the hill behind her, she quickly turned to see who it was. But, though the car made a noise like the Little Rattler, it wasn't the doctor.

"I wonder what his office hours are," she thought. "I wonder if they're printed on his sign."

She crossed the street and walked back down the hill, as though she had remembered an errand at Kingsley's store.

"'Office hours—Five to six,' " she read on the sign. "Its nearly five now, so I may see him somewhere."

At Kingsley's she bought a spool of thread and started up the street again, as through she had remembered another errand, this time at Dearnley & Clark's.

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Two cars passed her, Charlotte turning to look at each, but neither was the Little Rattler. "He may be delayed on a case," she thought, and going in to Dearnley & Clark's she bought a yeast cake.

A number of customers were in the store, and when Charlotte finally came out the Little Rattler was standing in front of the doctor's house, and she caught sight of Neil disappearing through the office door.

"I guess I'd better go home," she thought, her heart sinking. "If I had met him on the street I wouldn't have minded. But to go after him in his office, after what I did that afternoon—oh, I never, never could! I'll have to wait for another chance."

Walking with resolution she went to Briggs' Livery Stable, and came out a few minutes later in the red-wheeled buggy, Mr. Briggs seated by her side,

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driving with dignity behind his enormous mustache.

"What a great, silly thing you are," Charlotte told herself, "running away from Neil like this! Perhaps you'll never see him again—till some bold thing has gone and married him!"

"I don't care," thought Charlotte.

"Yes, you do!" she almost passionately told herself. "Else why have you been thinking about him so much lately?"

"Well, I don't care," she thought. "A girl has her pride."

"And how about his?" she asked herself. "Don't you suppose he had any pride, or any feelings, either, that afternoon when you ran away and left him there because you thought he wasn't good enough? Oh, Charlotte, Charlotte!" she sadly continued as the buggy crossed the railroad tracks. "You, who used to think yourself so smart, and set yourself such sums!"

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“Yes, and I *am* smart.”

“Well, then! Well, then!” she impatiently cried to herself, and the next moment she spoke aloud to Mr. Briggs, saying: “Stop a minute, please! I forgot something at Doctor Kennedy’s. We’ll have to go back.”

Neil had a number of patients in his reception room when Charlotte walked in, and a number of others came in while she was waiting there. At last her turn arrived, and in she went, a demure, old-fashioned figure, but her heart beating “Boom . . . Boom . . . Boom . . .” like a little bass drum.

“Why, what a stranger!” said Neil, after the first stare of surprise.

They shook hands in a manner that wasn’t far from being formal, and he congratulated her on winning the championship. Charlotte was seated in the patient’s chair, tongue-tied, nervous, wondering why on earth she had ever come, her heart no longer booming but

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feeling heavy, out of all proportion to its size. Nor did it help her when Neil stopped talking and waited for her to speak.

"I—I had a letter from Aunt Hepzibah the other day," began Charlotte. "She wasn't feeling very well. I—I was wondering whether you'd come over to Marlin Mills and see her."

"Why, certainly," said the young physician, glancing at his engagement card. "Any hurry?"

"Well," hesitated Charlotte. "I was going back myself this afternoon. And I thought, perhaps ——"

"I see," he nodded. "We'll run right over as soon as I'm through here. Say, in half an hour—will that do? All right; I'll be ready."

Half an hour later she bravely returned to the doctor's. Neil must have seen her from the window.

"Do you mind waiting another ten minutes, Charlotte?" he asked, coming

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to the door. "I've got a patient in the office and another one coming." He led her into the front room and placed a chair near the window. "Here's a magazine," he said; "I shan't be long."

But Charlotte didn't care about reading. As soon as Neil had gone, she looked around the room as though it interested her more than any fiction could have done. It was a large room with medallion wall paper, and the furniture belonged to that period in which Doctor Baldwin had spent his young manhood—when the ladies billowed in crinolines, and the gentlemen supported silk hats, and the little girls wore those plaited pantalettes and rolled their hoops with such decorum.

Telling herself that she wished to look at the pictures, she started on a breathless little tour of investigation.

"What a state everything's in!" she thought. "I don't believe the furniture has been rubbed for years." She patted

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the carpet with her foot and an eager little whirl of dust came hurrying out to see who was tapping. "Poor Neil!" thought Charlotte. "It's a shame—the way he's being neglected! Working hard all day and then coming home to a place like this! If I could only find a duster ——"

But that, of course, would never do, and Charlotte was returning to her chair by the window when she happened to look through an open door into the next room. It was a library with a marble fireplace, and a pair of andirons which were probably old when Washington was a boy. But after one look Charlotte had no eyes for the marble fireplace, nor the old andirons, nor the bookcases which lined the walls. Her glance was held, as though mesmerized, by a silver frame on the desk—a frame which held a picture of herself standing side by side with Lady Salisbury!

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" she gasped. "So

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he still cares, or he wouldn't have done that! But why does he act so distant and dignified?"

It didn't take her long to find a plausible answer.

"Yes," she thought, "it must be his pride. It's because I ran away that afternoon; and, of course, he doesn't know—that I've changed. I shall have to show him, somehow, that I'm sorry I ran away—if I can—without being bold."

She was still thinking it over when Neil's last patient went.

"Perhaps if I give him an awfully sweet smile when he comes in," she thought—"like this."

But "awfully sweet smiles" had never been in Charlotte's line, and when she practiced one her face felt so funny that she straightened it at once and frowned to herself with her expressive eyebrows, as though to restore the balance.

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Neil came in at the same moment to say he was ready.

“He’ll think my frown was meant for him,” thought Charlotte, her heart sinking again. “Oh dear, how can I let him know?”

They started in silence, except for the noise which the Little Rattler made, and presently, leaving the town behind, they turned west for Marlin Mills.

“I can’t *say* anything,” thought Charlotte, “because he might not take it right, and then I’d feel humiliated all the rest of my life. Perhaps—if I sat a little closer ——”

So she sat a little closer, which required more downright courage on Charlotte’s part than the whole game which she had played with Lady Salisbury.

But nothing happened. The Little Rattler roared away as unconcernedly as ever, and Neil kept his eyes fixed on the ruts and turns ahead.

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“Perhaps—if I sat a little closer yet!” thought poor Charlotte. So she screwed her courage tighter and sat a little closer yet, but the only thing which happened—alas!—was that Neil moved farther away, as though to give her room.

“Crowded?” he shouted above the rattle of the car, his eyes still fixed on the ruts and turns.

“N-no,” said Charlotte in a faint voice. “I’m all right.”

As imperceptibly as possible she returned to her end of the seat and sat there, feeling like a rose probably feels when a foot has stepped on it.

They reached the place where the three abandoned houses stood next to the tumble-down church—that church with its roof fallen in and its steeple awry. The sight of it always affected Charlotte, but this time it fairly depressed her, standing there like an omen, a

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premonition of what her own future might be.

"We'll be there in a few minutes now," she thought; "and if he goes away this time ——"

Her mind began to work in desperate haste.

"I can't propose to him," she thought, a queer little pain in her breast; "and I can't lay my head on his shoulder and—and start crying! Yet I do believe he cares, or why would he have that picture on his desk?"

"Ask him!" she whispered to herself.

"I don't like to," she thought.

"Ask him!" she sternly repeated to herself. "You pride yourself on being smart, don't you? Well, then—ask him!"

She drew a full breath—such a full breath that you might have expected her to burst out in loud exclamation.

"Neil!" she whispered.

The Little Rattler drowned it.

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“Neil!” she said in a louder voice.

But still the Little Rattler drowned it.

“Neil!” she shouted and, to make sure, she touched his arm as well.

The young physician immediately slowed the car, but although the Little Rattler somewhat abated its noise he was obliged to shout to make himself heard. “Did you speak?” he shouted.

“Yes!” shouted back Charlotte. “When I was waiting for you I saw my picture on your library desk. Why have you got it there?”

At that he suddenly stopped the engine and such a silence fell that all the world seemed to have hushed itself to listen. For as long as it might have taken you to count ten Neil looked at her, and what he saw in her eyes I cannot tell you, but when he spoke his voice trembled as Charlotte had once heard it tremble before.

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"You want to know?" he asked.

"Yes," nodded Charlotte, not trusting herself to speak.

"Because I think—and have always thought—that you're the greatest little girl in the world. Of course, I know I've got no chance now, but ——"

Still Charlotte said nothing, but she raised those expressive eyebrows of hers as though to say: "You've got no chance? . . . Why, Neil, who told you that?"

The next moment one of his arms had slipped around her waist (which seemed to yield itself to the pressure, quite in the immemorial manner), and his other hand pressed gently against her cheek so that she couldn't turn her head away.

"Charlotte," he said. "Listen: If I were to tell you I love you, would you run away again?"

"Not this time," she whispered, finding her voice at last.

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They kissed, their glances melting together, and in that moment Charlotte knew that the mission of The Apple Tree Girl was ended, that Little Miss Moses had reached the Promised Land.

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